Talking crisis politics in Greece and Germany: Perceptions of crises and political strategies from below. Politics of solidarity or competition in Europe?

Garyfallou, Anastasia

2021

document version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT

TALKING CRISIS POLITICS IN GREECE AND GERMANY: PERCEPTIONS OF CRISES AND POLITICAL STRATEGIES FROM BELOW. POLITICS OF SOLIDARITY OR COMPETITION IN EUROPE?

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad Doctor of Philosophy
aan de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam,
op gezag van de rector magnificus
prof.dr. V. Subramaniam,
in het openbaar te verdedigen
ten overstaan van de promotiecommissie
van de Faculteit der Sociale Wetenschappen
op woensdag 3 november 2021 om 11.45 uur
in de aula van de universiteit,
De Boelelaan 1105

door

Anastasia Garyfallou

geboren te Thessaloniki, Griekenland

promotor:	prof.dr. P.G. Klandermans
copromotor:	prof.dr. C. Saunders

promotiecommissie:	prof.dr. B.J.J. Crum
	prof.dr. G. Stoker
	prof.dr. V. van Ingelgom
	prof.dr. S. Hutter
	dr. L.S. Nencel

Table of contents

List of abbreviations

AfD = Alternative for Germany

ANEL = Independent Greeks

CDU = Christian Democratic Union of Germany

CSU = Christian Social Union in Bavaria

DE = Germany

EC = European Commission

ECB = European Central Bank

ES = European Semester

ESM = European Stability Mechanism

EU = European Union

FDP = Free Democratic Party

GR = Greece

HoGeSa = Hooligans against Salafists

IMF = International Monetary Fund

KINAL = The Movement for Change (ex-PASOK)

MENA = Middle East and North Africa

MEP = Member of the European Parliament

MoUs = Memoranda of Understanding

NATO = North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NPD = National Democratic Party of Germany

PASOK = The Panhellenic Socialist Movement

PEGIDA = Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident

PM = Prime Minister

SPD = Social Democratic Party of Germany

SYRIZA = The Coalition of the Radical Left – Progressive Alliance

TINA = There Is No Alternative

TTIP = Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

Troika = EC, ECB, IMF

“I can also add European policy, I think it’s very important, because all these issues that have now been discussed depend on it, and you somehow notice that the EU is united as long as no problems arise. Greece, the economy and refugees – as soon as problems arise – it’s like the average German marriage.”

(Konrad, 41-60 HE, excerpt from the German focus groups)

“I think the strategic goal is to shape European citizens, not Greek citizens, European citizens, who would be aware of the European context and therefore of the global context that Europe is embedded in from a very young age. In other words, active participation in shaping European citizens for a Europe that is much more substantial and far more, let's say, fair.”

(Zacharias, 61+HE, excerpt from the Greek focus groups)

“Some representatives of the history of liberal political thought would have us believe that we emerge into this social and political world from a state of nature. And in that state of nature, we are already, for some reason, individuals, and we are in conflict with one another. We are not given to understand how we became individuated, nor are we told precisely why conflict is the first of our passionate relations, rather than dependency or attachment.”

(Judith Butler, The force of non-violence: An ethico-political bind, p.20)

Chapter 1. Introduction: Talking crisis politics in Greece and Germany

More than a decade has passed since the "Lehman Brothers" financial crash in 2008 and crisis politics has become the new normal. As a reminder, the economic recession that hit the U.S. was soon transmitted to Europe. That was a critical time for member states that were well positioned in the world economy and kept their finances in check, and those, mainly in the European periphery, who faced rising economic difficulties (Hall, 2018). Greece was the first country to enter a prolonged recession, joining the so-called "debtor" group, after receiving financial assistance so as to avoid a default on its debts. Germany on the other hand, managed to recover from the financial crisis, leading the so-called "creditor" group that provided money and set the conditions for the bailout agreements [Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs)] (Scharpf, 2011). That was the first out of a series of crises that would erupt in Europe. From the financial to the sovereign debt and Eurozone crisis to the so-called refugee crisis in 2015, Greek and German citizens have been present in each and every of these problem-areas, with their oftentimes conflicting relationship attracting media and scholarly attention (GGcrisi, 2013; Sternberg, Gartzou-Katsouyanni, & Nicolaidis, 2018). The two publics would subsequently decide whether they are partners or opponents in Europe, and thus whether they would help each other or compete for resources and status.

Crises are part of major episodes of institutional innovation called critical junctures (Collier & Munck, 2017). Critical junctures develop in long periods of time and trigger significant alterations to path dependent politics. They comprise of antecedent conditions, the crisis or shock, the critical juncture itself and the legacy. My data and scope of analysis covers the emergence of the various crises in Europe in 2015-2017. The project examines citizens' perceptions of crises and political strategies inductively, in two countries that highlight Europe's power asymmetries between centre and periphery, creditor and debtor countries[1] (Adler-Nissen, 2017). It is thus a spatial comparison *during crisis times*, and not a temporal comparison before and during crisis conditions. Crises dramatize "a *perceived threat* to an institutionalized pattern of action" (Graf & Jarausch, 2017: 12). They render politics more plastic and social change more tangible, because they signify that existing institutional arrangements no longer work and a new

[1] Discursively, I refer to Greece first because it is the paradigmatic crisis case in the pair and appears to be at the lower end of power dynamics compared to Germany.

paradigm is needed (Koselleck & Richter, 2006). There is ample research on crises as objective structures, but citizen discourse on the matter is a hiatus in the field. According to Stanley (2014: 19), a crisis "is essentially a narrated process that is brought to life through a process of problem definition, an interpretive battle over the causes and solutions to that problem, and an intervention that seeks to resolve the crisis". Consequently, the way crises are perceived, defined and narrated, conditions the range of interpretations and the type of citizens' political responses to these problem areas. My project investigates the ways in which Greek and German citizens construct the crises in their own terms, in order to explain their selection of political strategies to cope with the situation, as suggested in the aims and objectives of my thesis.

1.1. Aims and objectives

When I embarked on this project, the Germans had already rewarded the conservative party CDU and Chancellor Merkel in the 2013 federal elections so as to prolong existing leadership in the country and the EU (Bremer & Schulte-Cloos, 2019). Contrary, in the 2015 general elections, the Greeks voted in office a radical left party to re-negotiate with the Troika of lenders (EC, ECB, IMF) the politics of austerity portrayed as bailouts (Karyotis & Gerodimos, 2015). A pressing question emerged: Why did Greek citizens turn increasingly to the left, while German citizens shifted predominantly to the right to respond to the crises erupting in their societies (see Roberts, 2017)? An intuitive answer is that the two publics do not perceive the crises and are not affected by them in the same way.

Instead of a theoretical deductive approach, the current study aims at an inductive, societal reconstruction of the crises and their characteristics. It investigates with mixed methods the meaning citizens attach to these problem-areas and the justifications they provide for their political engagement. The study employs survey data to establish the big picture in Greek and German politics. Yet more importantly, the study aims to present, using focus groups, citizens' discourse about their lived experiences beyond the commonly cited statistics. For instance, what does a 25% GDP reduction mean for a citizen living in Greece? How does a citizen in Germany feel about receiving 1.5 million refugees? What does a two-point difference in democratic satisfaction signify for a Greek vis-à-vis a German citizen?

Furthermore, as political elites in Greece and Germany declared that "There Is No Alternative" (TINA) to their management strategy (Hindmoor & McConnel, 2015), I wish to

examine whether citizens agree with this decision or whether they suggest alternative political strategies to tackle these problem areas. This is an important empirical question for the assessment of democratic quality and legitimacy in the two countries, and a significant contribution to the literature my thesis seeks to make.

1.2. State of the field and contribution to the literature

Literature has examined the transformative effects of crises on movement politics (Castells, 2012; Della Porta, 2015; 2018), party politics (Hutter & Kriesi, 2019a; Kriesi & Pappas, 2015), and European politics (Castells, 2017; Hooghe & Marks, 2018), at the meso and macro level of political actors and representative institutions, in order to identify generalizable patterns for the emergence of critical junctures and socio-political change. Della Porta and colleagues compare the rise of progressive left-wing movements such as the Indignados and Occupy, promoting democratization while challenging (the crisis of) neoliberal capitalism and TINA doctrines. Kriesi and the POLCON team investigate the transformation of the electoral arena[2] in Europe as a result of political conflict generated by the Great Recession and driven by populist right-wing parties that oppose globalization and European integration.

Castells and colleagues, employing Eurobarometer data, approach these diverse crises (financial, refugee, political, environmental etc.) as Europe's crises rather than nationally confined issues, and relate them to rising democratic deficits in domestic and European politics. Moreover, Roberts' (2015; 2017) comparative study of debt crises and their transformative effects on party systems in L. America in the 1980s and 1990s, shifts the focus on the importance of political configuration between incumbent and opposition for a successful (realigning) crisis management. With the exception of Castell's (2017) edited volume and Della Porta's (2015) focus on the democratic crisis of neoliberal capitalism, the majority of these studies tends to take "the crisis" as a given – it is the financial crisis, the Great Recession. My project instead, allows citizens to construct their own notions of crises that may be multiple and overlapping.

Discourse analytic studies are more likely to examine how "crises" as such are constructed. The authors of "Crisis discourses in Europe" (Murray-Leach et al., 2014) analysed European media reports on the Eurozone crisis. They found that political elites, domestic and

[2] The terms electoral and party are employed interchangeably in my thesis to refer to the institutionalized arena of political participation.

European, would rather problematize the crisis in economic but not political terms in an attempt to avoid criticism and electoral punishment. Yet, as this study shows, citizens on the ground perceive the Eurozone crisis as predominantly political. In addition, the GGcrisi project (2013) investigated media accounts of responsibility attributions in Greece and Germany in the Eurozone crisis. Contrary to expectations, they found that media and political actors in the two cases did not engage extensively in blame avoidance strategies; that is, shifting blame from domestic actors to the EU (Roose et al., 2017). However, due to their timeframe of analysis from 2010 to 2013, the authors examine the Eurozone crisis. My analysis paints a more complex picture with processes of assuming responsibility and shifting blame depending on the problem under discussion, the level of emergence and multiple actors involved in the crisis management strategy. All in all, a detailed account of how people on the ground define the crises they perceive and evaluate their political strategies to address them is largely missing in the literature.

My study attempts a conceptual, methodological and theoretical contribution by placing "the citizens" and their lived realities in the centre of analysis. Conceptually, the project aims at an inductive, societal reconstruction of the crises in Greece and Germany instead of a theoretical deductive approach. Doubtless, large scale comparative studies have advanced sociological understanding regarding the emergence of crises and their political outcomes, providing an encompassing framework for theory and analysis (Collier & Munck, 2017). However, even in the same European region, we notice divergences from these patterns, as in Greece and Germany, with regard to both crisis perceptions and selection of political strategies (Roberts, 2017).

Methodologically, the majority of studies employs survey data measuring trends in political attitudes and behaviour intentions at the aggregate level, raising issues of "cognitivism" and self-report biases (Wiggins, 2017). Even discourse analytic studies rely increasingly on media and elite framing of the crises, due to data availability (Murray-Leach et al., 2014). Clearly, quantitative studies allow for representative macro-level comparisons in time and space. Yet, they provide a descriptive picture because they fail to present citizens' own ideas and meaning-making processes when discussing politics (Saunders & Klandermans, 2020). This study, instead of defining the crises a priori, investigates with a mixed-method design (survey, focus groups), the meaning citizens attach to these problem-areas and the justifications they provide for their political engagement.

Moreover, the project proposes a theoretical contribution. For years, resource mobilization and political process – suggesting that it is resources and opportunities rather than grievances and threats that drive political participation – provided the main explanatory framework for citizen engagement (Kriesi, 2004; McCarthy & Zald, 1977). After the financial crisis in 2008 though, mainstream theories are at pains explaining how diminished resources (e.g., austerity) and curtailed opportunities (e.g., MoUs) have triggered massive political mobilization (Castells, 2012; Della Porta, 2015). Literature on critical junctures provides insights into the latter. Instead of an "either or" logic, the project argues for a dynamic, relational reconceptualization of the literature through citizen discourse. It focuses on the interaction among perceptions of grievances (injustice), mobilization of political actors (identity) and opportunity for action (agency). The following section outlines the research questions my thesis aims to answer.

1.3. Theoretical puzzle and research questions

In the 2015–2017 period under examination, three crises seem to have polarized politics in Greece and Germany: A financial crisis triggering tensions with regard to the bailout of Greece (and other "debtor" members states) by "creditor" countries like Germany (Scharpf, 2015); a refugee crisis with respect to the quota of refugees to be received in each member state (Della Porta, 2018); and a political crisis of representation and legitimacy at the state and European level as popular sovereignty has been sidestepped over a technocratic management of these crises (Castells, 2017). With environmental and pandemic crises (covid-19) on our doorstep, what Castells (2017) and Bauman (2014) referred to as *an era of multiple and multilevel crises*, has become increasingly visible. These multiple, simultaneous crises pose a dilemma for citizens between transitioning towards global governance (power without politics) and strengthening the nation-state (politics without power). Issues such as warfare, poverty, environmental catastrophe, immigration, geopolitical and energy crises, to mention a few common examples, challenged the capacity of the state to deal effectively with issues that surpass national borders and require transnational cooperation.

In this multiple-crises environment, Zamponi and Bosi (2016) pose the question "Which crisis?" to underline a misconception in the field. What is often discussed as "THE crisis" in Europe – referring to the financial crisis – actually varies tremendously across countries and regions. Historical and political legacy, democratization and political culture, size and openness

of the economy, transparency and institutionalization of the political system, whether a country was facing a crisis prior to 2008, are all important factors conditioning the *type and severity* of the crisis under discussion (Kriesi, 2014). This poses the first set of research questions I have designed to investigate the processes of crisis construction in the two cases: *How do Greek and German citizens define the crises affecting their societies? Is it one or multiple – local, national, or supranational – similar or different, and who is considered responsible for their emergence? How do Greek and German citizens conceive of one another – as allies or opponents in Europe?*

It follows logically that the way crises are constructed, defined and narrated, shapes the range of interpretations and type of political strategies to address them. It is thus no surprise that not only the type and severity of crises differ in the two cases, but also the volume, intensity and ideological orientation of citizens' political strategies (Hutter & Kriesi, 2019a). Overall, studies indicate a rise in political engagement in movement and party politics compared to previous years, especially in crisis-hit countries (Diani & Kousis, 2014). In movement politics on the left, the Indignant movement in Greece and Occupy in Germany have challenged the dominance of the markets over society and politics (Roose et al., 2017). Solidarity networks, welcoming refugees and assisting with basic needs, emerged in both countries (Lahusen & Grasso, 2018). On the right, anti-immigrant mobilization by the Golden Dawn in Greece and the PEGIDA movement in Germany attempted to put a halt on unconditional immigration (Dostal, 2015; Ellinas, 2015).

In party politics, economic voting with citizens in both countries punishing mainstream centrist political parties and rewarding left-wing and right-wing challengers has been tremendous (Hernandez & Kriesi, 2016). Restructuration of the political system marked its presence, with power shifts taking place from previous to novel dominant coalitions. In Greece the new dominant coalition emerged from the anti-austerity mobilization cycle, with citizens supporting primarily left-wing actors in movement and party politics (the Indignant movement, SYRIZA) (Karyotis & Rüdig, 2015). In Germany, on the other hand, the new dominant coalition emerged from the anti-immigration mobilization cycle, with citizens backing predominantly right-wing actors in movement and party politics (CDU, AfD, PEGIDA) (Bremer & Schulte-Closs, 2019). This poses the second set of research questions I have designed to map citizens' political strategies and the justifications they provide for their political choices. Namely, w*hich political*

strategies in the movement and party arenas do Greek and German citizens pursue amidst the crises? Which injustices do they address with their action, which political actors do they identify with, and which opportunities for action do they perceive? Do citizens suggest alternatives to political elites' TINA management strategies, and if so, what are the alternatives? My project aims to answer these questions by focusing on the citizens of two countries that highlight Europe's power asymmetries.

1.4. Country selection – Most different systems design

The country selection is a most different systems design that provides a focused comparison between a "crisis-hit" and a "crisis-surviving" case in Europe (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The selection is driven by a genuine interest in comparing the supposedly "weakest" link in the European chain (Greece) with the so-called "strongest" EU member state (Germany) (Adler-Niessen, 2017). Greece was selected as a representative case of the "debtor" group in the European periphery and Germany of the "creditor" group in the European centre (Scharpf, 2015). As such, the project investigates issues of power asymmetries and whether these affect citizens' crisis perceptions, their political strategies, and the relationship between the two publics. Although the project did not address the Greeks, the Germans, and their relationship in the research methods, citizens in the two cases referred to one another repeatedly when discussing crisis politics. The country selection aims at discursively (re)establishing solidarity ties between Greek and German citizens. Discussing their life stories, the project indicates that despite economist and nationalist propaganda, the two publics are not so different. Citizens in both countries wish to lead a worthwhile life, obtain a meaningful job, and enjoy quality time with family and loved ones; but when politics gets in the way, people become reasonably disenchanted.

Moving to country differences, Greece and Germany vary in their structural position in the world economy (periphery-centre) (Hall, 2018). They share diverse historical and political legacies (city-states direct democracy, post-authoritarian vs. federalism, post-Weimar and GDR tradition) (Berg-Schlosser & Rytlewski, 1993; Held, 2006). The openness and institutionalization of the political system differs in the two cases (centralized state vs. federalism, majoritarian vs. mixed parliamentary system) (Featherstone & Sotiropoulos, 2020; Saalfeld, 2002). As a result,

the countries have distinct political cultures[3], described by scholars as contentious in the case of Greece and moderate in the case of Germany (Colvin & Taplin, 2015; Vasilopoulou & Halikiopoulou, 2020).

In particular, Greece is a small country of eleven million in the European "periphery", with a modest economy driven mainly by small and medium enterprises and tourism (Pagoulatos, 2020). Despite being known for the direct democracy of the city-states in ancient times, Greece has a centralized state structure and a majoritarian (two-party) parliamentary system (Tsirbas, 2020). The country is considered a young post-authoritarian case that transitioned to democracy after two world wars, a civil war in 1946–1949 and a military coup in 1967–1974. Greece has enjoyed a relatively stable political system up to the financial crisis in 2010, suffering however from corruption and clientelism (Pappas, 2003). On the other hand, Germany is a vast country in the European "centre" home to eighty-three million, and the largest net contributor to the European Union (EU) (Bulmer & Paterson, 2010; 2013). The country's strong economy has allowed Germany to become the export powerhouse of Europe (Young, 2020). Germany is a decentralized federal republic consisting of sixteen states (Länder), with a mixed electoral system, proportional at the regional level and majoritarian at the federal level (Lees, 2001). The country is considered a stable mature democracy after experiences with national socialism and communism, the cold war and the reunification process (Saalfeld, 2002).

Notwithstanding their differences, both cases share a certain *interdependence* in Europe. Greece and Germany are both members of the EU and Eurozone. They circulate the same currency (euro) and are subject to the same supranational institutions (e.g., ECB, Eurogroup), treaties, and lately Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) (Scharpf, 2015). Consequently, the crises in the two countries have entered the public debate, not only at the level of institutions, but also media and citizen discourse (GGcrisi, 2013; Sternberg et al., 2018). Particular stereotypes emerged, portraying the Germans as prudent, hardworking and responsible, and the Greeks as lazy, profligate and scamming (Reese & Lauenstein, 2014). Apart from yellow press, sadly, even focal political figures in the two countries, such as heads of states Tsipras – Merkel and their finance ministers Varoufakis – Schäuble, engaged in stereotyping and antagonism (Sternberg et

[3] Keating (2008: 108-109) defines political culture as the intergenerational transfer of political norms, values and ideas. It is a complex of influences that "shape the conditions for rational action, explain the workings of institutions and sustain social and political practices across time, while being amenable to human action".

al., 2018). The project examines whether citizens have reproduced or rather challenged the political conflict in their discourse.

All in all, Greece was selected due to the severity of the financial crisis, and Germany as the powerful counterpart in the relationship. It is a focal assumption of the project that by examining both the so called "strongest" ***and*** *"*weakest" cases in Europe's crises, can we grasp the complexity of the situation. Yet, another unexpected finding was that while scholars tend to approach Germany as surviving the crises (e.g., Hutter & Kriesi, 2019a; Kriesi & Pappas, 2015), citizens on the ground appear extremely dissatisfied with existing political arrangements. Hence, while one country may be surviving one type of crisis, it may as well be suffering from another, as I will show in Chapter 5. The project employs a mixed-method research design to investigate crisis politics in the two cases.

1.5. Research design – Comparative case mixed methods

I propose a mixed-method research strategy, coupling representative survey data (attitudes) with in-depth focus group analysis (discourse), to examine the processes of crisis construction and political engagement in Greece and Germany. Mixed methods involve integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis in order to answer different aspects of the research questions (Denzin, 2010). Quantitative and qualitative methods address the "what" and "how/ why" questions, offering a way of taking into account both structures and processes when investigating social phenomena (Woolley, 2009). They assist establishing relationships between factors and examining explanatory mechanisms behind these relationships. Consequently, they provide a bridge between the micro and macro levels of analysis (Denzin, 2010). Mixed methods allow for a fuller picture to emerge that would not be possible by employing either approach alone. As Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003: 14-15) argue, "no one can refute the argument that the use of more than one method produces stronger inference, answers research questions that other methodologies cannot, and allows for greater diversity of findings". These authors propose the notion of *inference quality and interpretative rigor* for evaluating the findings of mixed method studies as opposed to the common reliability and validity metrics.

In my project, the two methods are considered complementary. On the one hand, using survey research, I aim to capture broad generalizable patterns in Greece and Germany with respect to the issues citizens care about, political trust and democratic satisfaction, popular

political strategies and democratic alternatives. On the other, employing focus groups, I attempt to provide in-depth analysis of plausible explanatory mechanisms for these broad patterns through citizen discourse. The project is embedded in the European Research Council funded programme POLPART, examining political participation in nine countries[4] (Klandermans, 2013). The POLPART team designed and followed standardized comparable procedures in survey and focus group research in the two cases[5]. The methodology section starts with a description of the survey data, as they provide the basis for the more complex focus group procedures.

1.6. The POLPART survey

The POLPART survey was conducted online by the opinion poll company TNS NIPO in the summer of 2017. The sample is stratified with specific quota for gender, age and education in order to establish standardized comparisons among the POLPART countries. The samples in Greece (N=1120) and Germany (N=1110) are comparable (see Table A1.1 in Appendix). About 38% of participants were between 18 and 34 years of age, 45% were between 35 and 49 years, and 17% were between 50 and 65 years. Roughly 50% of participants attained lower levels of education (1-3 ISCED), 10% vocational training (4 ISCED) and 40% higher levels of education (5-6 ISCED). Equal representation of men and women was achieved. Differences in employment status indicate the effects of the financial crisis, with Greek unemployed participants reaching 24% in the sample, according to national statistics, compared to 5% in Germany.

The survey includes a selected variety of scales based on previous citizenship studies. Items include the most important issues in society, economic and income satisfaction, attitudes towards immigration, trust in political institutions, evaluations of democratic quality, participation in various forms of electoral and movement politics, attitudes towards populism, and preferred political decision-making processes. Due to the stratified nature of the sample, I cannot compare absolute numbers in the POLPART survey with general population surveys such as the European Social Survey (ESS) and Eurobarometer studies that employ random sampling procedures. However, I can engage in comparative arguments about the patterns emerging in the sample, and the magnitude of differences between the two cases. Secondly, the survey provides

[4] The nine countries involved in the POLPART project are the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, the UK, Greece, Romania, Hungary, Brazil and Argentina.

[5] The terms “I/my” are used to indicate my research choices and analysis, whereas “we/our” refer to the broader POLPART research programme within which my project is embedded.

documentation on the case of Greece – one of the hardest hit European countries. Amidst the crises, the country has exited cross-national survey programmes such as the ESS due to lack of funding. Thirdly, in a period of rising democratic deficits, I include a detailed scale of democratic quality (liberal, social, and participatory) originally launched in the ESS 2012 round. The scale is considered an improvement to the single item measuring satisfaction with democracy (see Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016).

The aim of the survey analysis is to discuss public opinion in Greece and Germany employing general statistics (means, measures of association). That said, I do not engage in hypothesis testing with multivariate and multinomial regressions as to leave room for participants' discourse about their lived realities, which cannot be captured by the generality of survey questions. Another issue refers to the time constraints of a PhD thesis. Comparative discourse analysis is undeniably a time-consuming endeavour. Yet, certain questions arise as to what self-report measures actually tap into – accuracy of information, cognitive processes, memory of events, participants' intentions or actual behaviour? As Billig (1987) points out in "Arguing and thinking", attitudes are not neat bundles of responses awaiting researchers to be discovered, but represent unfinished business in the continual controversies of social life. These controversies may be more effectively captured by free floating discussion than by checking pre-set responses to researchers' pre-formulated questions (Wiggins, 2017).

Notwithstanding these criticisms, surveys are indeed a useful tool in comparative cross-national large-scale designs, since they capture general societal trends that other methods are unable to. With respect to the focus groups, numerous interactions may capture the attention of the researcher. As only a limited number of sessions can be conducted and analysed, how common are these episodes of participant interaction? To give an example, during the exact same period, Greek focus group participants referred repeatedly to austerity and the political crisis that it generated, whereas the discussion in Germany was all about the refugee crisis – austerity was a non-issue. Does this finding stem from diverse societal processes in the two cases or is it a by-product of the timing and synthesis of the focus groups? Had I not conducted the survey analysis, I would have not been able to know with certainty. The survey data indicated that in the exact same period, the most important issues in Greece were indeed related to austerity (unemployment, poverty, taxation), whereas in Germany they referred to the refugee crisis

(immigration, terrorism, social security), as will be discussed in Chapter 4. The project argues for methodological pluralism and triangulation of information, if possible, to methodological purism (Della Porta & Keating, 2008). The following section discusses the importance of citizen discourse[6] in the examination of crisis politics and outlines the focus group procedure.

1.7. Talking crisis politics

From the democratic assemblies of the ancients to deliberative models of democracy, it is a common assumption that debating public matters with others increases political understanding as discussants are being reminded of other perspectives from which to approach the social world (Bennet et al., 2000). Focus groups represent "sociable public discourse" where participants collectively process and negotiate meaning around a given situation (Gamson, 1992). During the session, participants express their views on a topic, try to persuade other participants about the accuracy of their views or be persuaded by other arguments (Myers, 1998). Participants engage in a debate about the meaning of the social world, which is not given 'out there' but is collectively constructed and reconstructed through and during the discussion (Stanley, 2016). Therefore, focus groups offer an opportunity to observe processes of collective sense-making and can be taken as a kind of scaled-down version of what occurs in public life (Duchesne et al., 2013).

Focus groups are employed to capture the diverse lines of argumentation around notions of crises and political strategies. The clear added value of focus groups according to Stanley (2016: 9) lies in "their ability through sustained retrospective introspection to reveal previously taken for granted assumptions that underpin our common-sense stock of knowledge". Most importantly in this case, they offer insights into the legitimation process – approached as a "two-way street" – of political actors and ideas, where citizens are not the passive recipients of elite claims, but they can use ideas to create and alter institutions (Schmidt, 2014). In a period where citizens were denied their collective voice, it is relevant to examine whether politicians' attempts to tackle the crises in Greece and Germany were perceived as legitimate or were rather contested, and if alternative political strategies were enacted from below.

[6] According to Wetherell and Edley (1999) discourse refers to citizen talk and texts as social practices. It has an action orientation, since the social order is constituted intersubjectively as discussants engage in processes of collective sense-making. At the macro level, discourse is organized around institutional forms of intelligibility and reflects histories of power relations.

Political talk can be defined as "a specific type of social interaction, where two or more people engage in exchanges of meaning with reference to politics that take place in private, semi-public, and public settings and have an informal and spontaneous character" (Schmitt-Beck & Lup, 2013: 514). Perrin (2006) argues that "talking politics" can be considered a political act in and of itself and that together with "thinking politics" and "doing politics" forms the golden route to engaged citizenship. Contrary to more deterministic attitudinal approaches, talking politics has an action orientation as it captures participant interaction and intersubjectivity (Stanley, 2016). The unit of analysis is not individual attitudes, but the range of interpretative repertoires participants introduce to the discussion when referring to crises and their political engagement. Interpretative repertoires are "the situationally specific, culturally familiar, public ways of speaking which are used for characterizing and evaluating social phenomena" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 203). They are often expressed through metaphors or vivid images and employ distinct grammatical styles. Interpretative repertoires emerge between the micro and macro levels of social interaction, as they are embedded in political culture, providing a basis for common understanding of the social world[7] (Perrin, 2006). The aim of analysis is to include the many repertoires about crises and political strategies into an ideal-typical narrative (Weber, 1949), that is richer and more coherent than any of the participants' single interpretations. This form of analysis, however, excludes issues of intersectionality and is not suitable for addressing individual, idiosyncratic repertoires that reflect the unique experiences of systematically marginalized groups (Stanley, 2016). Acknowledging this limitation, I will refer to possible avenues for future research in the Discussion (Chapter 7).

This project draws on previous influential studies in the focus group literature about how citizens' understanding of politics is organized. Gamson's (1992) seminal study "Talking politics" investigated how "working people" discussed four politicized issues at the time (affirmative action, nuclear power, troubled industry and the Arab-Israel conflict). Employing pre-existing groups, he found that people are not so naive as they are often portrayed in the literature. Instead, they negotiate meaning with others in complex ways, using resources at their disposal such as experiential knowledge, popular wisdom and media framing. Perrin (2006) in

[7] Williams (2004: 96) suggests that the metaphor of repertoire "combines a sense of choice within structured options, leaving room for agency and strategic decisions, while still recognizing that cultural and historical circumstances circumscribe the options available, even privileging some choices over others".

"Citizen Speak" attempted to map the action repertoire in the U.S. employing pre-existing voluntary associations (church, business, unions and sports) and four popular scenarios (racial profiling, political corruption, environmental pollution, airport expansion). Distinguishing between individual, collective and institutional strategies, he found that participants' action repertoire was shaped by the possibility, importance, ethics and feasibility of these strategies in each scenario. In line with Gamson (1992) and Perrin (2006), I approach citizens as knowledgeable users of political discourse. Following Perrin's categorization of strategies, I aim to examine the availability, feasibility, and possible novelty of political action in Greece and Germany. Contrary to these studies and influenced by Saunders and Klandermans (2020), I let participants talk about the issues they consider important and the strategies to address them. I avoid pre-existing groups as to tackle established power dynamics that may affect participant interaction and argumentation (Krueger & Casey, 2014).

My project is one of the few engaging with comparative cross-national focus group research. Duchesne and colleagues' (2013) "Overlooking Europe" presented the analysis of twenty-four focus groups conducted with workers, employees, managers and activists in the UK, France and Belgium. The project examined citizens' spontaneous references to Europe and its institutions. The authors placed participants in socially homogeneous (age, occupation) yet politically heterogeneous (ideology) groups, as for them to feel at ease but also stimulate debate. Their study shows that discussants overall tended to overlook Europe when talking about issues that mattered to them – more so in the UK and least so in Brussels. White's (2011) "Political allegiance after European integration" investigated the plausibility of a common political bond in Europe. Conducting ten focus groups with taxi drivers in the UK, Germany and Czech Republic, the study suggests its absence, as participants' impromptu discussion focused increasingly on issues within their local and national environment, even when they comparatively referred to other Europeans. What both studies suggest is citizens' indifference towards Europe and its institutions, and the latter's absence from everyday political talk at the ideational and perceived institutional level. This study, applying similar criteria of social homogeneity and political heterogeneity as Duchesne and colleagues (2013), and examining discourse about the problematization of issues and political strategies as White (2011), partially replicates these findings. The EU is perceived by both Greek and German participants as distant and elite-driven, with detailed information on its actual function missing by and large. Contrary to these studies,

participants in this project engaged in long politicized debates about the EU, with a majority expressing from soft to strong Eurosceptic sentiments. The recent crises in Europe and the EU's role in their management may explain this divergence.

1.8. The POLPART focus groups

The Greek focus groups were conducted in Athens from October to December 2015 at the Kapodistrian University Lab, after the EU/austerity referendum, the government's U-turn to accept another MoU, and the snap general elections in September. The German focus groups took place in Berlin in October 2015 at the Items Berlin opinion poll company, following the onset of the refugee crisis and a massive demonstration against the TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership), but before the terrorist attacks in Paris, Brussels and Berlin later that year. The Greek focus groups were supervised by the author and the German focus groups by Swen Hutter and his research team, embedded in the POLPART project. Both procedures followed the ESOMAR[8] guidelines for social research and adhered to the ethical protocols of the partner universities involved in the project. Participants in the focus groups ranged from four to six as to capture opinion diversity without losing control of the group (Morgan, 1996). They were recruited through ads and flyers, and from an existing pool of participants according to specific selection criteria (see Table 1.2). The topic of discussion, which lasted roughly two hours, was disguised as "social issues" and there was a monetary reward of 20 euros to avoid selection bias and attract citizens that were not interested in the topic (Krueger & Casey, 2014). Upon arrival, participants were introduced to the topic of discussion (politics), signed informed consent, and were briefed on the ethical principles of anonymity, confidentiality, data protection, no harm and the right to withdraw at any moment in the research process.

The sampling aim was to guarantee a minimum of representativeness of the participants in the qualitative sense, by representing the diversity of interpretative repertoires on the topics of interest (Duchesne et al., 2013). Upon contact with the researchers, participants filled in a brief screening questionnaire on the phone in order to be placed in socially homogeneous but politically heterogeneous focus groups. The questionnaire included items on age, gender, ethnic background, educational attainment, political activity, political interest, political ideology and organisational involvement (see Table A1.3 in Appendix). Social homogeneity was achieved by

[8] The world association guidelines for market, opinion and social research.

grouping together participants with the same age and education, as for them to feel comfortable discussing with each other. Research has shown that age and education provide citizens with the necessary experience, knowledge and civic skills to discuss and participate in politics (Verba et al., 1995). Political heterogeneity was established by placing together individuals with different political ideology (left, centre, right), and levels of political activity (from apolitical to active in party and movement politics). The idea behind political heterogeneity was to stimulate debate so as to capture the variety of repertoires on crises and political strategies, while avoiding groupthink tendencies (Duchesne et al., 2013).

Following life course categorization, we formed four age groups with citizens in similar life stages: i) young adults (18-25), ii) working adults (26-40), iii) parenting adults (41-60), iv) retired adults (61+). These four age groups were further distinguished into lower and higher educated groups (see Table 1.2) according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED); with lower educated individuals that attended elementary, non-university education (ISCED: levels 1-4) and higher educated individuals that graduated university or higher levels of education (ISCED: levels 5-6). We also included a mixed age-education group of activists to capture more politicized repertoires on the topics of interest. Activists are considered a relatively homogeneous group in the sense that they acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to participate in politics compared to the general population (McAdam, 1986). They were recruited from political parties and social movement organizations, on the left and right of the political spectrum. In the focus group analysis, I use abbreviations to indicate the age and education level of the group under discussion. Hence, "Germany, 26-40LE" refers to the German focus group that consists of participants aged 26-40 who do not have a university degree.

Table 1.2. Overview of composition of the nine focus groups in each country

18-25 Low Education	26-40 Low Education	41-60 Low Education	61+ Low Education	Activists
18-25 High Education	26-40 High Education	41-60 High Education	61+ High Education	

In total 50 participants in Greece and 48 participants in Germany took part in the nine focus groups based on the selection criteria (age, education, ideology, participation) and their

availability. Tables A1.5 and A1.6 in Appendix present the full list of the focus group participants. Overall, the two samples are comparable (see Table A1.4 in Appendix). Equal gender representation was achieved, with roughly 55% of participants being men and 45% women. Education was evenly distributed, with about 45% of the sample having attained lower levels of education (1-4 ISCED scale) and 55% higher levels of education (5-6 ISCED scale). Mean left-right self-placement was 4.0 (2.5) among Greek participants and 4.7 (1.9) among German participants on an 11-point scale (0 extreme left and 10 extreme right). Mean political interest was 7.7 (2.2) among Greek participants and 8.1 (1.7) among German participants on an 11-point scale (0 not at all interested and 10 extremely interested). Large standard deviation in both cases indicates individual variation according to the selection criteria. Past political activity varied from no activity to engagement in party and movement politics.

The focus groups were conducted by a professional moderator and attended by the researcher, who assisted with practicalities, sound and video recordings, and kept notes of the sessions (Van Bezouw et al., 2020). A non-directive moderation style was selected, with the moderator setting the topic of discussion and letting participants engage in the debate. Non-direction gives participants the opportunity to express themselves about matters that are important to them, rather than what is presumed to be important by the researcher (Duchesne et al., 2013). Participants were encouraged to talk with each other instead of replying to the moderator as in a one-on-one interview. The moderator kept track of time, introduced the themes for discussion and made sure that all participants had equal opportunity to express themselves (Van Bezouw et al., 2020). At the beginning of the session, the moderator would explain that all opinions were valued and that participants may freely agree or disagree on topics, as they came from different ideological backgrounds.

The discussion would start with participants introducing themselves and reporting the first association that came to mind when hearing the word “politics”. This first task gave participants the opportunity to get to know each other, while simultaneously familiarizing them with the topic of discussion. The second collective task was a brainstorm session on the five most important issues in society. Participants would discuss together, and agree or disagree on issues at the local, national or international level. The moderator wrote the selected issues on a blackboard as to be visible to everyone (see Figure A1.1 in Appendix, Van Bezouw et al., 2020). The next collective

task asked, what we, as citizens, can do about these issues. Again, participants would work together to propose strategies they deemed legitimate and effective in addressing the selected issues. After a first round of discussion, the moderator presented a selection of pictures with individual and collective, moderate and radical, political strategies to stimulate further debate (see Figure A1.2 in Appendix, Van Bezouw et al., 2020). There would be a small break of ten minutes as participants got snacks and refreshments. The second part started with prompt cards. These cards showed names of main political institutions at the local (e.g., city council), national (e.g., government), supranational (e.g., EU) and international levels (e.g., NATO). Participants would select the institutions that were closest and most responsive to their demands, and those that were most efficient in addressing these demands through governmental policy. Participants' task was to discuss together the plausibility of their choices. The final theme addressed citizen disenchantment with politics and asked participants for plausible alternatives to democratic dissatisfaction. At the end of the session, participants were thanked and paid for their participation. The focus groups were transcribed verbatim by the moderator and participants' names were replaced by fictitious names for further analysis.

A constructivist grounded theory approach was selected, as to highlight inductively the ways in which participants define the crises in Greece and Germany, and their political strategies to cope with the situation (Charmaz, 2006). The eighteen focus groups were analysed with Atlas.ti – a computer aided qualitative data analysis package that assists the interpretative analysis by implementing a systematic coding of the discussions (Mattoni, 2014). The grounded theory analysis started with multiple readings of the discussions until a primary understanding of the texts was achieved. The analysis continued with assigning codes, agreed upon with the POLPART research team after an intense week-long meeting, to portions of text (see Table A1.7 in Appendix, Van Bezouw et al., 2020). These codes were categorized into larger families with an underlining common theme. I studied the relationships between codes and larger families as to make connections with theory (Charmaz, 2006). Analytically, I employed thematic analysis to summarize the issues discussed and the range of interpretative repertoires regarding those issues (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Interpretative repertoires were identified when: i) issues were talked about and developed in considerable amount of depth, by more than one participant, across multiple focus groups; ii) there were cross references in the discussions, and descriptions draw on more than one source of information (media, personal experience, popular wisdom); iii)

participants shared affective responses such as laughter or outrage, and iv) expression of opinion was followed up by other participants (White, 2011: 61). The conversational context of the focus groups prioritizes the presentation of excerpts to highlight argumentative interaction among discussants (Saunders et al., 2020). Individual quotes were employed to provide further clarification on interpretative repertoires about crises and political strategies. Finally, results and theory were discussed and compared with the German team. The introductory chapter closes with the outline of the thesis structure.

1.9. Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of three parts. Part one introduces the research design and analytical framework on discourse about crises and political strategies in Greece and Germany. The second part presents the research findings of the quantitative (survey) and qualitative (focus groups) analysis. The third part discusses the findings in light of the theory and suggests future directions for research.

Chapter 2 operationalizes the concept of "crisis" in the study and provides the theoretical framework for the analysis of the first research question – how Greek and German citizens perceive the crises in their countries. Synthesizing insights from critical junctures, discursive psychology and social psychology of intergroup relations, I derive the theory of social construction, discursive performance and subject positioning. The framework suggests that in order to understand how Greek and German citizens perceive the crises, we need to examine how ordinary people define these problem-areas in their own terms. Secondly, we ought to explore what they do with these crisis constructions vis-à-vis elite explanations. Thirdly, we need to interrogate how Greek and German citizens position each other in these crisis constructions and what this positioning tells us about the state of the union in Europe in times of crisis.

Chapter 3 operationalizes the concept of "political strategy" and addresses the second research question – how Greek and German citizens respond politically to the crises they perceive. The proposed framework synthesizes literature on critical junctures, economic voting, political process and framing discursive practices. It sets out to examine the availability, feasibility and subtlety of the action repertoire in Greece and Germany amidst the crises, with particular attention drawn on citizen discourse about injustice, identity, agency and alternatives. The theory focuses on the problems that citizens deem important, the mobilizing actors in the

movement and party arena seen as addressing injustice, and evaluations of agency, opportunity and democratic alternatives from below.

Chapter 4 introduces the empirical section of the dissertation. The chapter discusses public opinion in Greece and Germany. It employs survey data to capture the broad political patterns – the big picture – in crisis perceptions and political strategies and further tests the broader commonality and applicability of the focus groups. With respect to crisis perceptions, the analysis presents the differential problematization of economic, cultural and political issues in the two countries. As regards political strategy, it outlines citizen (self-reported) engagement in a series of electoral and movement strategies. In light of the survey findings, the chapter scrutinizes the latest election results in Greece and Germany and discusses attitudes towards democratic alternatives.

Chapter 5 presents the inductive focus group analysis of social construction, discursive performance and subject positioning in the Greek and German crises. The chapter examines the differential politicization of economic, cultural and political threats in the two countries and Europe's multilevel polity. The analysis illustrates that even though the crises in Greece and Germany may have been triggered by different issues, namely the economy and immigration, they are comparable due to the common crisis of post-democratic representation at the national and European level. The chapter further investigates the politics of solidarity and competition emerging between the two publics.

Chapter 6 presents the inductive focus group analysis about the availability, legitimacy and subtlety of political strategies in Greece and Germany. The chapter analyzes citizen discourse on grievances and injustice, the role of mobilizing actors in the movement and party arenas, opportunities and threats in the socio-political context for agency, and plausible alternatives to the status quo. Although the level, intensity and ideological orientation of citizen discourse about political strategies differ in Greece and Germany, common processes of polarization and radicalization are identified. Demos-centric[9] alternatives to the post-democratic crisis of representation are proposed in both countries.

[9] The term "demos-centric" underlines the importance of citizen inclusion in the political process for representation accountability and legitimacy in an era of rising democratic deficits and post-democratic politics.

Chapter 7 introduces the concluding section of the dissertation. The chapter summarizes the research findings and discusses the utility of the analytical framework proposed in the project. It addresses points of comparison and contrast, and provides plausible explanatory mechanisms for the similarities and differences in the two cases. The chapter discusses possible intergroup variation, outlines the limitations of the project, and suggests areas for future work. Finally, Chapter 8 offers direct answers to the main research questions and discusses scientific and societal implications of the thesis. It addresses current political arrangements in Greece and Germany, and positions the research project within broader socio-political transformations.

Chapter 2. Crisis theory: Social construction, discursive performance and subject positioning

The crises in Greece and Germany may seem different at first but they are part of the same process, that of globalization and European integration (Hutter & Kriesi, 2019b). Global and European interconnectedness may have reduced time and space among citizens, countries, products and services, yet they have triggered new challenges. Issues such as financial crises, immigration, climate change, warfare and terrorism, have challenged the capacity of the state to deal effectively with problems that surpass national borders and require transnational cooperation (Bauman & Bordoni, 2014). However, as political power and policy making moves higher to supranational and international institutions, state democratic politics are hollowed out of their significance, representative capacity and political influence (Della Porta, 2013; Mair, 2013). Scholars have referred to the crises as Great Recession, Eurozone, European, capitalist, financial, refugee and democratic to mention a few common examples (Castells, 2017; Della Porta, 2015; 2018; Giugni & Grasso, 2015; Hall, 2018; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019a; Pitty, 2014; Scharpf, 2015). Yet, *how citizens on the ground define these crises in their own terms? Are they affected by all and thus perceive them as interrelated or is one more predominant due to unique political histories, democratic legacies and civic cultures in the two cases?* The aim of the chapter is to develop a theoretical framework for the systematic analysis of the Greek and German crises through citizen discourse.

As a reminder, Greek citizens, severely hit by the financial crisis, were obliged to adopt austerity measures and structural adjustment programs by signing MoUs with the European partners (Karyotis & Gerodimos, 2015). These MoUs came with strict conditionalities that minimized the space for deliberation on crucial political issues (economic and social policy, privatizations, welfare state); and as a result, democratic legitimacy at the national and European level (Armingeon & Guthmann, 2013; Roth et al., 2013). Located at the southern border of Europe, Greece received large refugee flows from the MENA region as first host country according to the Dublin European Regulation, together with Italy and Spain (Della Porta, 2018). On the other hand, German citizens retained relative control over their economic policy, but they were pushed to bailout “debtor” countries like Greece, increasing taxes and political discontent among the citizenry (Kriesi, 2014). Being well positioned in Europe, Germany attracted large refugee flows from crisis-hit and war-torn areas, as financially crisis-hit countries could not

provide the requirements of political stability, economic development, and secure employment (Hutter & Kriesi, 2019a).

These two crises, namely the financial and refugee, and their technocratic TINA management, have triggered a crisis of democratic representation and legitimacy at the national and European level (Castells, 2017; Della Porta, 2015). Hindmoor and McConnel (2015) argue that although elites may suggest that "There Is No Alternative" to a particular management strategy, in reality there are always more than one way to deal with a crisis. Firstly, politicians can speak up and involve the citizenry in the decision-making process or they can shut up public dialogue and pursue technical solutions. Secondly, they can allow a government to be consistent with its programmatic agenda or they can apply incongruent policy measures. Thirdly, they can attribute importance to mutual interdependence and internationalism or they can assert domestic interests. As participants in the focus groups suggest, citizens in both countries were never asked whether they wished to participate in the bailout packages or accept large numbers of refugees – their support was taken for granted by domestic and European politicians. This political crisis is a crisis of responsiveness (Mair, 2009), as national governments have become increasingly attuned to economic and business interests in the European and global market in order to provide stability and prosperity to their constituents (see post-democracy, Crouch, 2004). Yet in the case of Greece, it is also a crisis of responsibility as these same promises of stability and prosperity have been negated by a state of permanent crisis and crisis-management since 2010 (Castells, 2017).

There is ample research on crisis politics in Europe (Castells, 2012; 2017; Della Porta, 2015; 2018; GGcrisi, 2013; Giugni & Grasso, 2015; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019a; Kriesi & Pappas, 2015; Lahusen & Grasso, 2018; LIVEWHAT, 2017). However, it approaches "crisis" as an objective structure and tends to focus on one type (financial, refugee etc.) instead of their sequence and interaction as multiple and multilevel. This project seeks to investigate how citizens themselves define the crises by examining political talk about the issues they deem important. The chapter argues that in order to understand citizens' perceptions of crises in Greece and Germany, we first need to discuss how they define these crises in their own terms. Next, we need to examine what citizens accomplish with these particular crisis constructions vis-à-vis dominant elite explanations. Thirdly, we ought to investigate how Greek and German citizens position each other and other nationals in these crisis constructions, and what this positioning tells us about

intergroup relations in Europe. The chapter begins with the operationalization of the concept and proceeds with the elaboration of the theoretical framework – namely social construction, discursive performance and subject positioning.

2.1. Conceptualization of crisis

The concept has its origin in the Greek word “krisis”, which entails both objective and subjective connotations. The objective connotation defines a situation as severe or critical, whereas the subjective connotation indicates cognitive processes of perception and critique. Thus, its etymological origin demonstrates that the notion is closely related to *human perception and subjectivity* (Koselleck & Richter, 2006). Among the most common uses of the term, in medicine crisis signifies the crucial moment of a severe illness that determines whether the patient will live or die. In the military, it describes the moment of the battle in which the decision over victory or defeat is declared. In religion, it refers to the Last Judgement where people are assigned to heaven or hell according to their pious lives (Graf & Jarausch, 2017: 3). In modern times, crises became the transitional and potentially disruptive periods in history. In Marxist theory, they defined phases of turmoil in which antagonistic powers competed with each other until a new stage of development and stability was reached (Harvey, 2007). In the period of great revolutions, such as the French and the Russian, the concept was introduced in political science to refer to times of conflict, turmoil, and radical social change (Koselleck & Richter, 2006). During the Great Depression in the 1930s, the concept was recontextualized in economics to explain business cycles of prosperity and recession (Streeck, 2015). In times of globalization, the range of the concept expanded to describe international crises, political systems in crisis, economic crises, societies in crisis, and cultural crises (Graf & Jarausch, 2017).

In this project, I retain the structural element of the concept, which signifies the emergence of a threatening situation that poses a crucial dilemma between two alternative states of the future: one that is deemed desirable and another that is considered harmful (Koselleck & Richter, 2006). Discursively, the concept combines diagnostic and prognostic elements. The diagnostic element refers to the process of identifying the causes of the problem(s) under discussion, while the prognostic element indicates plausible strategies to tackle the latter (Stanley, 2014). Depending on the level of analysis, crises can be studied at the macro level of political systems and institutions, the meso level of collective actors like social movements and

political parties, and the micro level of citizens and social groups. The project focuses on the micro level of interaction between the citizens and the state (Klandermans, 1997). As shown in Figure 2.1, the relationship between crisis, citizens and the state, is intrinsically related to notions of democratic representation and legitimacy. Current democracies are representative and operate on majoritarian rule (Dahl, 2000; Held, 2006). Which means that first, it is not citizens themselves who rule and are called upon to deal with a crisis, but elected officials; and second, political decisions are expected to represent the preferences of the largest segments of the population. As the term "demos+cracy" indicates, inclusion of citizens' preferences in the polity is of utmost importance for a regime to acquire legitimacy (Della Porta, 2013). A regime is legitimate, when citizens regard that they are substantially represented in the polity, and the state does not resort to violence to impose social order (Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016; Weber, 1965). When the system lacks legitimacy, the social contract is broken and citizens do not comply with the rules anymore.

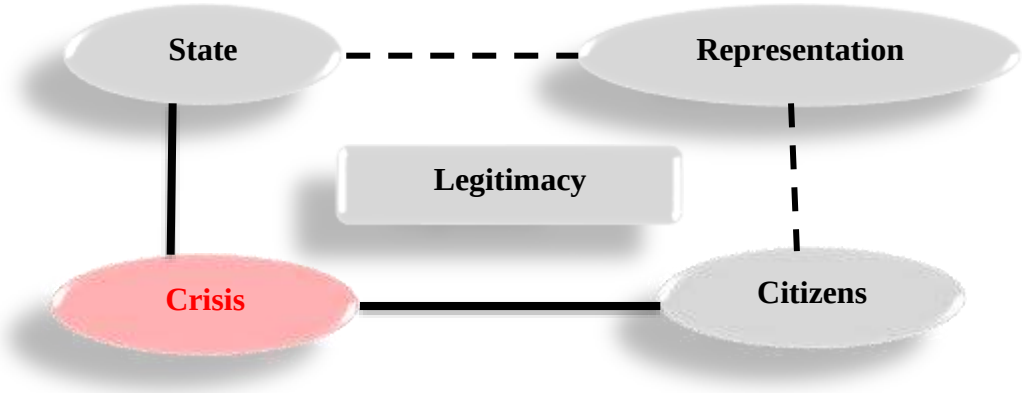


Figure 2.1. Conceptualization of crisis at the micro level of analysis

Politics regulates the distribution of power among the spheres of civil society (citizens), the state (government), and increasingly with globalization, the markets (economy) and international institutions (Rodrick, 2011). This relationship varies across political systems, nonetheless it ought to be balanced. Otherwise, tensions rise when one actor gains influence over the other(s). Lately, the markets, supranational and international actors have gained prominence in European politics, deciding even the fate of member states (Della Porta, 2013). As Ferrín & Kriesi (2016: 2) point out, to a larger extent than ever "supranational agencies and other unaccountable actors such as central banks, the Troika, panels of experts, major enterprises,

investors and the bond market are calling the shots". External actors seem to dominate democracy, especially in crisis-hit "debtor" countries like Greece (Pitty, 2014); but also, as this project indicates, in crisis-surviving "creditor" countries like Germany.

Yet, not all crises (e.g., economic, immigration, environmental) transform into generalized political crises, threatening the legitimacy of incumbent parties, and eventually if they pursue, the political system as a whole. A certain type of crisis can trigger a legitimacy crisis when politicians and institutions are perceived as unable to tackle effectively a threatening situation over a critical period of time. Hutter and Kriesi's (2019: 33) definition is illuminating: A political crisis emerges when "routine incremental problem solving no longer works, when institutions are no longer taken for granted, when compliance of the citizens is no longer guaranteed, and when positive feedback processes accentuate rather than counterbalance the emerging crisis". This macro-level definition, however, does not take into consideration *citizens' subjective perceptions*, which is the focus of this project. According to Hay (1996: 225) crises are "*narrations* of failure" and Stanley (2014: 19) argues that "crises are essentially *narrated processes* that are brought to life through a process of problem definition, an interpretive battle over the causes and solutions to the problem(s), and an intervention that seeks to resolve the crisis". Consequently, political talk is a suitable arena to examine how citizens perceive and define the crises, their causes and characteristics.

The designation of any given situation as a crisis, actual or perceived, creates an exceptional state of emergency that requires unusual measures (Coleman, 2013). It separates certain areas from the "business as usual" politics, in which political decisions can be overturned in the next election cycle (Graf & Jarausch, 2017: 12). Thus, crises render politics more plastic and social change more tangible from a political opportunity perspective, because they signify that existing institutional arrangements no longer work (Kriesi, 2014). Political opportunity and social change can emerge "top-down" via politicians and institutions, but also "bottom-up" through citizen mobilization and engagement (McAdam et. al, 2001). Crucial for the latter, as proposed in Figure 2.2 , is: 1) a precise definition of the crisis under discussion – social construction of crisis; 2) the articulation of responsibility attributions for the problem, which may be supportive or antagonistic of dominant discourses and practices – discursive performance of crisis constructions; and 3) the relational placement of citizens vis-à-vis politicians and social

groups, differentiating between allies and opponents in a crisis situation – subject positioning in crisis constructions. The theoretical discussion of the suggested building blocks is the focus of the next sections.

Figure 2.1. Model for the analysis of citizen discourse on the Greek and German crises: Social construction, discursive performance and subject positioning

2.2. Social construction

Crises as social phenomena signal that particular systems, be it economic, cultural or political, have encountered some form of severe malfunction, indicating the need for paradigm change (Koselleck & Richter, 2006). It is thus crucial to identify which paradigm may be considered problematic, and the direction of change citizens envision, if we wish to understand what the crises under examination are about. Framing a problem as a crisis, political actors portray an imminent threat that demands immediate responses (Hay, 1996). The stakes in the political arena go up and the temperature of political conflict rises because decisions will supposedly affect future generations (Coleman, 2013). A perceived as "successful resolution" may provide support and legitimacy to the political actors involved, leading to possible de-escalation and a new level of stability (Graf & Jarausch, 2017: 12). However, a perceived crisis mismanagement may lead to a prolonged and generalized crisis.

As a result, crises generate deep ideological divides and discursive struggles over the most adequate framing of the origins and the most appropriate exit strategies (Hay, 1996). Defining what a crisis is about (which crisis) in a state of multiple threats suggests an ideological

conflict over which issues should be considered predominant. Crises generate political conflict in society, because they are characterized by scarcity of resources and uncertainty regarding the potential consequences of perceived threat(s) (Kriesi, 2014). This project differentiates between material, symbolic, and political threats. Material threats refer to perceived risks to afford basic resources such as food, employment and housing (Sherif & Sherif, 1953). Symbolic threats relate to perceived risks to people's sense of worth, value, and influence over the environment (Tajfel, 1982). Political threats involve risks to democratic quality, citizen representation, political accountability and social justice (Della Porta, 2013). A crisis may trigger all three, yet which threats become politicized in the public debate depends on the resonance with citizens' lived realities and discursive contestation in the public sphere (Stanley, 2014).

The politicization of threats is not coincidental, but embedded in a legacy of socio-political struggles. Cleavages are societal divisions which were shaped by politicized conflicts that took place during nation-state formation and consolidation and left an enduring mark on society (Bartolini & Mair, 1990). Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) seminal work identified four types: centre-periphery, religious-secular, urban-rural, and workers-capital. The national revolution produced a cleavage between the central state, peripheral communities and a supranational church. The industrial revolution triggered a cleavage between urban and rural areas and later between employers and workers (Hooghe & Marks, 2018). Crises tend to activate previous (class, religion) and/or trigger new cleavages (Europe, globalization), as political actors struggle to define and tackle the problematic issue-areas. A suggested recent cleavage emerging with globalization and European integration is the integration – demarcation cleavage, with political actors adopting favourable or opposing views towards further world integration (Hutter, 2014; Kriesi et al, 2008; 2012). The theory argues that by supporting growing international interconnectedness since the 1970s, politicians of different ideological orientations gradually aligned with pro-globalization and pro-EU agendas in the areas of the economy, immigration and politics (Hobolt & Tilley, 2016) (see Chapter 3 for further theoretical elaboration). The project examines the issues that trigger crisis perceptions in Greece and Germany and discusses the broader cleavages in which they are embedded so as to evaluate current theoretical approaches.

As Hay (1996: 255) points out, "power resides not only in the ability to *respond* to crisis, but to *identify, define,* and *constitute* crisis in the first place". For instance, framing the financial

crisis as a "Greek/German particularity" or a "global capitalist crash", makes a difference in identifying what the problem is about, who should be held responsible, and which strategies need to be pursued to tackle the problem. Hay (1996) proposes that the discursive construction of crisis should be seen as a process of "abstraction and meta-narration" through which various stories about complex events and statistics are linked together as "symptoms" of this crisis (Angouri & Wodak, 2014: 544). Since people relate their experiences to one another through narration, they place together diverse sources of information into a plot, connecting a beginning and middle of a story with a conclusion in temporal and causal ways. Such repertoires compete in terms of their ability "to find resonance with citizens' *lived experiences*, and not in terms of their 'scientific' adequacy as explanations for the condition they diagnose" (Hay, 1996: 255).

In this process, particular interpretative repertoires may appear more effective in conveying citizen experience than others, providing the discursive foundations for the interpretation of crises. They facilitate the formation of a unifying explanatory framework for the perceived causes, effects, and crisis characteristics, and offer justification for the proposed courses of action (Benford & Snow, 2000). It goes without saying that the social construction of such a unifying interpretative framework is the outcome of political contestation and negotiation of shared meaning in the public sphere (Gamson, 1992). Typically, there is individual variation in the extent to which citizens accept and circulate it, yet the question remains: why is it that in this particular time and place, people tend to perceive a crisis situation as such and not in other ways? In my view, it is because these perceptions are not random or limitless, but they are constrained and enabled by their situatedness in a specific historical and socio-political context (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). They resonate with citizens' lived realities that facilitate a particular interpretation of the crisis under discussion. As such, crisis constructions provide the opportunity to reconstruct that very societal context that generated them and offer insights on the motivations and justifications for citizens' particularistic crisis perceptions. Moving to the next section, social constructions do not only describe lived realities, they also perform specific discursive functions.

2.3. Discursive performance

Engaging in constructions and re-constructions of the social world, citizens pursue their discursive and political aims. They debate these social constructions in discussions with one another to evaluate the accuracy and appropriateness of their stories and strategies (Perrin, 2006).

In this process they may introduce certain interpretative repertoires circulated through the media and citizen interaction to get their point across. They may also present their own stories to validate or discredit these discursive constructions by employing popular wisdom, or personal and anecdotal evidence (Gamson, 1992). Thus, particular crisis constructions have also strategic *performative functions* in relation to particular audiences (Coleman, 2013). They may be employed as to embrace, critique, subvert, revise, or resist a particular framing of the problem (Stanley, 2014).

Citizens are historically and culturally situated within not only a specific interactional context, such as European, German or Greek politics, but also within a rhetorical/argumentative framework in the public debate (Angouri & Wodak, 2014). Billig (1987) argues that there are always alternative versions of reality and arguments that a specific crisis construction may counter, even though these are not always indicated explicitly. This is where ideology comes into the picture. Billig and colleagues (1988) argue that ideology comprises of contrary themes. In this sense, ideology is not a complete and unified system of beliefs that directs people's perceptions and actions. Instead, ideology is seen as containing contrary themes, such as generalizations (all Greeks are cheats), but also particularizations (yes but not my friend Anastasia) that enable people to perform particular discursive practices (speech acts) vis-à-vis specific contexts and audiences (Wiggins, 2017). Gamson (1992), in his seminal work "Talking politics", made a similar distinction between themes and counter-themes in ideological debates. Without contrary themes, citizens could neither puzzle over their social worlds nor engage in debates about crises.

The dilemmatic aspect of ideology is also important for voicing or silencing alternatives to the status quo (Billig et al., 1988). Constructing particular version of crises, it is important to examine which arguments are presented as common-sensical and which others are silenced, and why. One basic function of ideology is to present one pole of an argument as self-evident and legitimate, while placing the other in non-existence or marginalizing its status as utopian and counter-productive (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). By addressing both sides to a story, citizens may appear to acknowledge the broader universal picture within which crises take place, and to be driven by motives of fairness instead of particularistic interests. On the other hand, citizens may selectively present a discursive construction that portrays them in a favourable light and provides

justification to their actions, concealing information that could delegitimize their choices (Tajfel, 1982; Turner et al, 1987).

Hay (1996) points out that constructions of crises are in essence narrations of failure, and as such it is important to examine where citizens place the locus of responsibility for the crises they perceive. Is it themselves, refugees, national governments, the EU, international actors, the markets, all or nothing of the above that are blamed for the problematic situation? Perceptions of failure are threatening to people's self-esteem, and thus, as causal attribution theory (Kelley, 1973) suggests, people have the tendency to attribute successes to personal characteristics and failures to external circumstances. Therefore, constructing particular versions of crises, citizens may seek to assert responsibility for the situation by acknowledging their fair share; or they might attempt to avoid blame by identifying other actors as responsible for the negative turnout of events (Roose et al., 2017). Asserting responsibility may sound intimidating but restores agency and a sense of control to the speaker. Blame avoidance may present oneself in a positive light, but takes away control over the situation and may lead to victimization.

Billig (1987; 1988) suggests that the presence of ideological dilemmas may be universal, meaning that dilemmas emerge in all societies. However, the content of these dilemmas varies in different societies and times. Diverse patterns of cultural norms, beliefs and actions give rise to diverse patterns of dilemmas and crisis constructions (Stanley, 2014). Consequently, crisis constructions and their performative functions are expected to trigger ideological dilemmas in both cases – for instance pro-austerity and anti-austerity positions in the Greek and German crises; yet, the content of these dilemmas is expected to be sensitive to particular historical, cultural and socio-political developments in each society – for example, what does austerity signify for a German vis-à-vis a Greek citizen? By assuming the existence of contrary themes in discursive constructions, a dynamic image of the citizen emerges, that of a strategic performer in front of an audience, instead of an obedient subject who conforms blindly to ideology and the status quo (Billig et al., 1988). Constructing versions of crises not only has performative argumentative functions, but *positions* particular actors as allies in a crisis situation, while placing others as opponents.

2.4. Subject positioning

Summing up the literature so far, social constructions of crises are essentially narrations of failure that blame particular actors for the crisis situation (blame attribution); present some actors as victims and others as perpetrators (locus of responsibility); and position specific actors as allies and others as opponents (locus of solidarity/competition) (Roose et al., 2017; White 2011). Consequently, crisis constructions are intimately related to perceptions of history, political culture, and shared collective identities. Stråth and Wodak (2009: 16) point out that major crises can be seen as "condensed events with symbolic or iconic value" that are construed as "turning points in history". Such interpretative repertoires involve "contentious value mobilization" (right/wrong, good/bad, friend/enemy) and provide the discursive foundations for building new or politicizing existing collective identities that locate particular subjects as allies and others as opponents (Simon & Klandermans, 2001).

Collective identities refer to the idea that "a group of people accept a fundamental and consequential similarity that causes them to feel solidarity amongst themselves" (Fligstein, Polyakova & Sandholtz, 2012: 7). This sense of collective identity is socially constructed. It emerges as the intentional or unintentional consequence of social practices and interactions (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Since people are raised in families and communities, they tend to identify with the groups in which they are socially located. Age, gender, class, ethnicity, religion and nationality have been at the basis of citizens' collective identities (Brewer, 1999). Collective identities are not static or stable, but dynamic and context dependent. Meaning that as people ascribe to multiple identities, the latter become salient depending on the context in which they are activated (Wenzel, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2007). Brubaker and Cooper (2000) make an interesting claim against the reification of identity concepts as static personality traits, but argue instead for investigating the *processes* of identity formation and categorization, of subject positioning and boundary formation in discourse.

Drawing on the work of Davies and Harré (1990), subject positioning refers to the discursive practice in which individuals assign positions to themselves and others. It is a relational activity, since others are positioned as the discussants position themselves, and it can exceed the intentions and awareness of participants (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Subject positions may refer to the discussants as subjects, the protagonists in a crisis situation; the social groups and categories discussants construct for themselves. At the same time, there are those who are

different from them, who can be seen as allies or opponents in a crisis situation. White (2011: 96) suggests that allies are "people like us", who even though may live in different environments, they share with us the same predicament in a crisis situation. Opponents are "people who are different from us" and with whom a competitive relationship is constructed, such as when one benefits at the expense of the other. The project examines the ways in which Greek and German citizens position one another, and the groups they approach as allies and opponents in their crisis constructions.

An important prerequisite for the discursive construction of allies and opponents is acts of social comparison (Reese & Lauenstein, 2014). By engaging in social comparisons, citizens appear to acknowledge that the problems they face are not idiosyncratic or personal, but are located in a broader field of experiences in which other people may be involved (White, 2011). According to relative deprivation theories, citizens and social groups tend to compare the type and intensity of their grievances to others as to evaluate their predicament, instead of simply assessing the objective material conditions in society (Klandermans, 1997; Runciman, 1966). It is through comparisons with others that citizens become aware of the nature of their problems, and the extent to which they can be seen as justifiable or soluble (White 2011). Hence, acts of social comparison have a function. In a just world, collective identification and subject positioning could be considered neutral descriptions of social location. Vast power inequalities within and between social groups, however, trigger conflicts – material, symbolic and political. Tajfel (1982) and the social identity framework suggests that people tend to stress ingroup similarities and underline outgroup differences as to present the discussants and their reference groups in a favourable light. This is due to the fact that people strive for positive identification and thus they are more likely to attribute positive traits to their reference groups and negative to the ones perceived as outgroups (Turner et al, 1987). The greater the conflict between social groups, the greater the discrepancy between positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation (social polarization) (Brewer, 1999).

As Reese and Lauenstein (2014) argue, ingroups and outgroups are comparable with reference to a common superordinate category that includes both the in- and outgroup. In the case of the Greeks and the Germans, "Europe" could function as a superordinate category that provides the criteria for intergroup comparisons between the two publics. The superordinate

category sets the positive standard against which the inclusive subgroups are compared (Wenzel et al., 2007). The comparison criteria are not stable and natural, but historically constructed and socially contested. The more one's own group resembles the prototype, the more positively is evaluated. When the superordinate category is negatively perceived, however, for example when the Germans or Greeks see Europe as a problematic social formation, ingroup members are likely to distance themselves from the superordinate category (Reese & Lauenstein, 2014). Members of the negatively evaluated group may then try to change the standard of comparison, in an attempt to maintain positive self-identification, employing strategies of social creativity (Tajfel, 1982). In the focus groups, for instance, whereas the Greeks tended to portray themselves as "poor but hospitable", the Germans would refer to their group as "conformist but responsible".

In the context of Europe's crises national categories became particularly salient. Existing studies indicate the emergence and circulation of particular (racist) stereotypes attributed to the two publics (Adler-Nissen, 2017; Sternberg et al., 2018). For instance, while the Germans were characterized in the media as prudent, hardworking and responsible, the Greeks were largely portrayed as lazy, profligate and scamming (Bickes, Otten, & Weymann, 2014; Kutter, 2014). In everyday political talk, stereotypes "constitute parts of arguments, used by the authors of those arguments to enhance self-representation, establish meaningful categories, explain inequalities, and negotiate power" (Theodossopoulos, 2013: 202). Thus, it is no surprise that in a period of scarce resources and uncertainty, of material and symbolic threats, citizens in Germany and Greece resort to stereotyping to simplify and gain control over a complex reality. Yet, the existence of stereotypes among Greek and German citizens about one another and other Europeans would also indicate a problem of European integration at the citizen level and a lack of solidarity between these publics in times of crisis. All in all, crisis constructions position particular actors as political subjects, the protagonists in a crisis situation, and others as allies or opponents. These subject positions are indicative of the state of intergroup relations in Europe, their solidaristic or antagonistic character. They allow us to examine the image of the superordinate category against which the subgroups are evaluated, disentangling points of approval and criticism to the European project from below in a period of widespread political disenchantment. The next chapter illustrates the theoretical framework for the analysis of citizen discourse about political strategies in the Greek and German crises.

Chapter 3. Political strategies theory: Discourse about injustice, identity, agency and alternatives

The crises in Greece and Germany have underlined the representation gap between politicians and citizens at the state and European level, and brought Europe's multi-level governance structure centre stage (De Vries, 2018a; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019b). Citizens in crisis-hit "debtor" countries like Greece have been pushed to accept extreme austerity policies against their own interests (Armingeon & Guthmann, 2013). Likewise, citizens in crisis-surviving "creditor" countries such as Germany were pressured to bailout crisis-hit "debtor" countries like Greece, raising political discontent among the citizenry (Bremer & Schulte-Cloos, 2019). With the onset of the so-called refugee crisis in 2015, citizens in both countries received increased migration flows from crisis-hit and war-torn regions in search of peace and stability (Della Porta, 2018). These political decisions were presented to them as non-negotiable TINA management strategies (Hindmoor & McConnel, 2015). However, Greek and German citizens were not convinced by politicians. They contested elite strategies and opened up alternative ways to tackle the crises with their contentious political mobilization. This begs the question that I address in the chapter: *How did citizens respond to the problematic political environment in Greece and Germany? Which political strategies – citizens' purposeful activities in the electoral and movement arena – did they pursue amidst the crises (financial, refugee, political), and why?*

Greece stands out among European countries for the severity of the impact of austerity measures on people's lives and the extent of anti-austerity mobilization in movement and party politics (Karyotis & Gerodimos, 2015). Diani and Kousis (2014) noted over 20.210 protest events in the country taking place between May 2010 and March 2014; the formation of the Indignant movement in 2011, with 36% of the population participating in it and 70% expressing support (Karyotis & Rüdig 2015); and the emergence of a vast self-organized solidarity network with ordinary citizens providing necessities and assistance to people in need due to lack of state provision (Kousis, 2017). In the electoral arena between 2010 and 2015, the Greeks triggered and participated in four (snap) general and one European elections, punishing mainstream parties (labour PASOK and conservative New Democracy) considered responsible for the crises, while rewarding challengers mainly on the left (anti-austerity SYRIZA), but also on the right (far-right Golden Dawn) (Altiparmakis, 2019). In 2015 the Greeks elected the first radical left party

(SYRIZA) in government since the overthrow of the military coup in 1974, and triggered a referendum on the submitted austerity plan by the Troika of lenders (EC, ECB, IMF) – the first since the abolition of monarchy in 1975. The turnout was massive and 61.3% voted 'No' to more austerity.

Germany, on the other hand, is often depicted as the powerful counterpart of Greece during these crises. The country is widely considered a stable and moderate liberal democracy, scoring highest in the Polity IV index of democratization among European countries (Dolezal, 2008). Germany witnessed also a wave of discontent in movement and party politics, however, later (towards the end of 2014) and with less severity than Greece (Weisskircher & Hutter, 2020). In the movement arena, Occupy protests were staged in Berlin and Frankfurt outside the ECB headquarters between October and November 2011, yet citizen participation was low (8.000-9.000) and the movement did not attract the support that was manifest in other parts of Europe (e.g., Greece, Spain) (Roose et al, 2017). A massive protest of 250,000 participants took place in Berlin against the TTIP and the lack of transparency in the EU negotiations of the treaty in 2015 (Weisskircher & Hutter, 2020). In the 2013 federal elections, the Germans rewarded the grand coalition between the conservative Christian Democrats (CDU) and labour Social Democrats (SPD) that kept the financial crisis at bay. The unresolved Eurozone crisis and the onset of the refugee crisis, however, triggered a wave of citizen disenchantment with consensus centrist politics (Bremer & Schulte-Cloos, 2019). Already since the end of 2014, the weekly marches of the PEGIDA movement made their presence noticed throughout the country (Dostal, 2015). Germany saw also the emergence of a radical right party, the *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany; AfD). The party appeared in 2013 as a Eurosceptic response to the Greek bailouts. Yet by 2015, it transitioned into a radical nationalist party (Arzheimer & Berning, 2019). The AfD made electoral gains in state elections, and eventually emerged as the main opposition in the 2017 federal elections – coming third after the CDU and SPD, and appearing in 14 out of the 16 state parliaments.

In light of these tumultuous times, processes of *polarization* – vacation of the moderate centre – and *radicalization* – expression of increasingly radical political positions – are observed in both countries (McAdam et al., 2001). Yet, Greek citizens supported predominantly left-wing actors, whereas German citizens strengthened right-wing actors in the party and movement arenas

(see Roberts, 2017). The aim of the chapter is to provide a theoretical rationale for these differences by focusing on the discourse of those most commonly missing in the literature, citizens themselves.

Scholars disagree on the causes and outcomes of the crises in Europe. One line of literature, focusing on the party arena in advanced democracies, argues that political change is triggered mainly by populist right wing actors opposing globalization and European integration (Kriesi & Hutter, 2019a; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). These authors suggest that processes of modernization and post-materialism have rendered citizens' values increasingly progressive and liberal. As such, a "cultural backlash" is emerging from the "losers of globalization and European integration" (Kriesi et al., 2008; 2012; Hutter, 2014) – primarily white, male, working class conservatives, who perceive their privilege, power and traditions being threatened by cosmopolitan, multicultural, gender-fluid citizens. These right-wing supporters protest the transference of decision-making powers to the EU and ask for renationalization of politics (De Vries, 2018b). Whereas the first theory takes capitalism and modernization for granted and prioritizes the cultural cleavage, the second theory problematizes the relationship between the economy and politics, capitalism and democracy, and focuses on the class cleavage (Castells, 2012; Della Porta, 2015; 2018). Examining mainly the movement arena, these scholars argue that social change is triggered by anti-austerity and pro-refugee social movements and parties that challenge neoliberal capitalism and TINA doctrines. These mainly left-wing actors bring forward participatory, direct and social democratic demands, criticizing democratic deficits in national and European politics, with the aim of democratizing the latter (Castells, 2012; 2017). This project, taking into consideration citizens' political strategies in the movement *and* party arenas, in two countries that are differentially positioned and impacted by Europe's crises, indicates that both tendencies are present. Findings depend largely on the research focus on party or movement politics, and the selection of cases (centre-periphery, north-south).

Moreover, for years resource mobilization and political process – suggesting that it is resources and opportunities rather than grievances and threats driving political participation – provided the main explanatory framework for citizen mobilization (Kriesi, 2004; McCarthy & Zald, 1977). After the financial crisis in 2008 though, an increasing number of studies shows that political engagement is triggered by grievances such as economic deprivation, cultural backlash,

political distrust and democratic dissatisfaction; facilitated by the mobilization of new or transformed political actors in the movement and party arenas (anti-austerity, anti-immigrant, Eurosceptic); and the emergence of threatening political contingencies (austerity measures, long summer of migration, EU's supranational policies (Della Porta, 2015; 2018; Giugni & Grasso, 2015; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019a; Kriesi & Pappas, 2015). Could it be that while resources and opportunities predict citizen engagement in prosperous times, it is grievances and political threats that drive the latter in crisis times? Literature on critical junctures provides insights into these processes, which is the focus of the chapter (Collier & Munck, 2017; Roberts, 2015).

The chapter is structured as follows. First, the concept of political strategies will be operationalized, followed by literature on critical junctures and political mobilization in party and movement politics. The third section discusses political talk and framing discursive practices. The chapter closes with the explanation of the theoretical framework for the analysis of citizen discourse about political strategies, namely injustice, identity, agency and alternatives.

3.1. Conceptualization of political strategies

Politics indicates "the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence, in conditions that are always potentially *conflictual*" (Mouffe, 2000: 101). Conditions are potentially conflictual due to unequal distribution of resources, power and status within society and the world hierarchy (Adler-Nissen, 2017; Tajfel, 1982). Politics can be examined at the level of citizens and social groups (micro); parties and organizations (meso); institutions, regimes and states (macro) (Klandermans, 1997). The chapter focuses on micropolitics, that is citizens' political power in society vis-à-vis interest groups, political organizations and institutions. Traditionally, political strategies refer to "those activities by citizens that aim at influencing the government, either by affecting the choice of government personnel or by affecting the choices made by the government personnel." (Verba & Nie, 1972: 2). This commonly cited definition is closely related to a liberal conceptualization of democracy in which public representatives and electoral competition lie in the centre of the political process (Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016). Nevertheless, it is not the only definition in the field.

More participatory or direct democratic conceptualizations approach political strategy as deliberation among diverse groups in society so as to reach a collective decision, like attending town hall meetings or organizing public assemblies (Held, 2006; Habermas, 1996); or even as

direct involvement in the community or decision-making process by the citizens concerned, such as engaging in referenda and participatory budgeting (Barber, 1984; Pateman, 2012). A more recent conceptualization by Van Deth (2014) defines political strategies as all voluntary activities by citizens located or targeted at the sphere of the government, the state or politics, and aiming at solving collective or community problems; on the condition that these activities are used to express political aims and intentions of the participants. The classic definition of political engagement is expanded to take into account participants' intentions when engaging in the polity, and capture innovations in the action repertoire including expressive or personalized "life style" activities like political consumerism, social media usage and communitarian living. Therefore, the concept of political strategies depends on the notion of politics and democracy citizens have in mind (Bengtsson & Christensen, 2014)

Political strategies can be further categorized into two groups based on their form and arena of activities, namely party and movement politics (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010). Party politics offers the institutionalized route to political influence, with elections held at regular intervals, at predefined local, national or supranational levels (Katz & Crotty, 2006). Movement politics on the other hand, is far more episodic and less predictable as there is no institutionalized rhythm prescribing when and how protest events should occur (Della Porta, 2015; Tarrow, 2011). Party politics involves activities related to political parties such as voting, contacting, donating, campaigning, being a party member and engaging in voluntary work. Movement politics involves activities staged by social movement organizations, interest groups and civic associations like signing petitions, engaging in demonstrations, occupations of public sites, strikes, blockades and activism to mention a few common examples (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010).

The fact that participation in party and movement politics differs does not mean that citizens feel constrained by the division of labour in the social sciences. The most plausible hypothesis is that citizens employ party politics, movement politics, or both as they see it fit to their objectives (Klandermans, 2013). For instance, even though distinct, political parties and social movements are embedded in multi-organizational fields sharing connections which may be supportive or antagonistic (Hutter, Kriesi, & Lorenzini, 2019). Social movements can join electoral coalitions or turn into political parties themselves (Della Porta et al., 2017). Alternatively, political parties may facilitate movements by forwarding their political demands in

the electoral arena, or they may hinder them by co-opting or repressing them (Kriesi, 2004). The relation between party and movement politics is also context dependent. In election years citizens are more likely to take the opportunity and engage in the party arena to voice their preferences, whereas in protest cycles they are expected to participate increasingly in movement politics (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010).

Therefore, citizens may exert political influence by engaging in party politics, movement politics, or both. However, they may choose to do nothing and disengage from the political process altogether. Already since the 1990s, an increasing number of studies has been addressing a grave concern with political disengagement especially among young people and disadvantaged groups (Franklin, 2004; Hay, 2007; Putnam, 1995; Stoker, 2006). These authors reverse the question, asking instead why citizens should bother to participate at all, since politics is a cognitively complex, time consuming and at times frustrating and dangerous activity (e.g., police repression). Lack of political knowledge, interest in politics and resources such as time, income or education are important factors behind political disengagement (Stoker & Hay, 2017). In addition, macro level processes triggered by recent changes in modern democracies contribute to disengagement, such as marketization of politics and generational replacement by more apolitical voters (Franklin, 2004); reduced social capital in the individualist culture of capitalism (Putnam, 1995); and dissemination of post-democratic technocratic institutions in the neoliberal era (Hay, 2007). As argued, however, political engagement in periods of crises is expected to differ from those in prosperous times. The next section explains why.

3.2. Critical junctures and political strategies in the electoral arena

As discussed in the previous chapter, in order to explain citizens' selection of political strategies in Greece and Germany, it is crucial to identify which arrangements are considered problematic and what kind of paradigm is emerging. Polanyi (1944) in his seminal work "The Great Transformation" reflected on "the double movement" between market liberalization and protectionism in the Great Depression. In current times of Great Recession (Hutter & Kriesi, 2019a), dysfunctional institutional arrangements seem to indicate citizen disenchantment with consensus centrist 'third-way' politics (Hobolt & Tilley, 2016). As mainstream labour and conservative parties moved to the centre to attract more voters, they transformed into "catch-all

parties" and eventually "cartel parties", converging programmatically in economic policy, immigration, democracy and Europe (Katz & Mair, 1995; 2009).

In economic policy, centre-left labour parties moved to the right by gradually adopting pro-market legislation, increasing privatization and deregulation, while cutting down on public spending to advance competitiveness in the common market (Crouch, 2004; Hay, 2007). In immigration policy, centre-right conservative parties moved to the left by progressively opening up borders for people, products/services and corporations, in fear of capital flight (Beramendi et al., 2015; Hobolt & Tilley, 2016). In democratic politics, mainstream labour and conservative parties prioritized economic efficiency and responsibility to citizen representation and responsiveness in order to generate growth (Mair, 2009). They aligned with pro-EU agendas, transferring decision-making powers to supranational non-majoritarian institutions such as the European Commission and the European Council, which lie further away from citizen representation and democratic accountability (Della Porta, 2013; Mair, 2013). Their long-time supporters appear visibly dissatisfied, since they cannot discern meaningful policy differences between centre-left and centre-right mainstream parties, finding themselves unrepresented in the public sphere. As a result, they turn to more ideologically distinct parties to represent their interests. The ideological struggle takes place between progressive and reactionary alliances on the left and the right of the political spectrum (social, egalitarian, environmental, feminist politics vs. neoliberal, elitist, nationalist, patriarchal) (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Furthermore, positions on "Europe" and globalization appear to add a transnational dimension to political conflict (Hooghe & Marks, 2018; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019b).

Hay (2007) suggests that this crisis of representation and legitimacy was in the making since the 1970s with the change of socio-political paradigm from embedded liberalism to neoliberalism and the fall of communist and socialist regimes as alternatives to capitalist democracies. Accelerated by globalization and European integration, a shift from a 'welfare state' to a 'market-based' model of democracy emerged, where citizens are portrayed as consumers of social policies, while parties function as firms competing against each other to attract voters (Della Porta, 2013). Colin Crouch (2004) coined the term "post-democracy" to portray the secret alliance between politicians and business that has led to de-politicization of previously contested socio-economic and political issues. In post-democratic times, political

decisions are taken in isolation by groups of specialists (politicians, EU and IMF technocrats), while citizens' demands are approached as irrelevant or "populist" in the political debate (Stavrakakis, 2014). In a similar manner, Peter Mair (2013) underlined the "hollowing of democracy" due to the declining representative capacity of political parties, and proposed a crisis of responsiveness plaguing national and European politics.

The post-democratic crisis of representation is also visible in Europe's multilevel polity. Although the EU began as a peace project and attracted citizen trust and support the first decades after World War II, this started to change after the oil crisis and cold war period (Castells, 2017). The difficulty to ratify the Maastricht treaty in 1992 and the unsuccessful EU referenda in France, the Netherlands and Denmark in 2005 marked the beginning of the so-called Euroscepticism period (De Vries, 2018a). The latest crises appear to have contributed to this trend. But why are Europeans dissatisfied with the EU? Literature suggests that the EU is to a great extent an elite-led project that has been largely unexplained and under-advocated to the average citizen (Follesdal & Hix, 2006). Studies show that Europeans lack knowledge of the EU and its institutions (Duchesne et al., 2013). Voter turnout in European elections is low, since citizens perceive that they are not substantially represented in the European Parliament (Mair, 2013). The latter appears weak as the design of the EU prescribes that policy-making at the European level is dominated by executive actors like the EC and the ECB (Crum, 2018). The actions of these executive agents are beyond the control of national parliaments and their citizens. What is more, the EU functions mainly to regulate trade and market integration. This means that it responds less to citizens than to market forces (Schmidt, 2014). Despite developing new institutions and instruments after the 2010 Eurozone crisis (e.g., European Stability Mechanism, European Semester), the latter empower executive rather than representative functions (Crum & Merlo, 2020). Scholars tend to agree that the EU's growing focus on monetary unification has undermined its political imperative of developing a "European demos" (Habermas, 2012; Mair, 2013).

Moving to citizens' political strategies in the electoral arena, according to economic voting literature, in the short-term citizens punish political parties and politicians that performed poorly just before or during the crises by abstaining in the next elections or even rewarding opposition parties (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2007). Attribution of responsibility for bad

economic performance is of utmost importance for retrospective economic evaluations and electoral punishment. Research shows that it is not objective economic indicators that matter for economic voting, but *citizens' perceptions* that bad economic performance is the result of poor governance (Hernandez & Kriesi, 2016). Whether it is the government or the EU blamed for the crises has important implications for electoral punishment (Costa-Lobo & Lewis-Beck, 2012). If deleterious performance is seen as the outcome of external forces and not the government, the effects of economic voting may be minimized. Economic voting is cyclical, which means that after an economic recession, citizens return to their partisan loyalties.

Long term outcomes, as outlined in cleavage theory, involve the restructuration of party systems (dealignment and realignment), with new challengers entering the political system and power shifts taking place from old to new dominant coalitions (Hooghe & Marks, 2018). These new challengers appear as old cleavages re-emerge (class, religion), and/or new cleavages (Europe, globalization) surface due to the crises. Whereas in Greece the new dominant coalition emerged from the anti-austerity mobilization cycle and positioned itself on the left, in Germany it surfaced from the anti-immigration mobilization cycle and placed itself on the right (Hutter & Kriesi, 2019a). Important for the stabilization of party systems is programmatic realignment of policy responses; meaning, consistency between political positions and policy implementation. Crisis experience in L. America (Lupu, 2014; Roberts, 2015) shows that citizens detached themselves radically from left-wing labour parties that introduced (de-aligning) austerity and market liberalization policies, triggering electoral abstention, reactive electoral sequences and societal upheaval that lasted years after the post-adjustment era. Conversely, when austerity and structural adjustment programs were implemented by right-wing conservative parties with the opposition expressing societal resistance, political transition was more stable and durable.

3.3. Critical junctures and political strategies in the movement arena

Citizens may also engage in social movements and solidarity networks to bring about social change from below, especially when elections are scheduled far in advance or when political parties are delegitimized due to major scandals or poor governance (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010). Crises trigger discontent due to grievances related to scarcity of resources and uncertainty regarding the potential outcomes of perceived threats (Kriesi, 2014). Grievances are shared perceptions that a social group is denied rights, opportunities, respect, safety, or some other form

of social good, and are analogous to the severity of crises (Buechler, 2013). Grievances may be felt as relative deprivation in comparison to the status of another social group, illegitimate inequality, suddenly imposed grievances, and violated principles generating moral outrage (Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013). Grievance theories suggest that the emergence of socio-economic strain in society such as unemployment or income deprivation, and their attitudinal or emotional consequences (anger, resentment, indignation) can motivate citizens to engage in collective action to ameliorate the problematic situation (Buechler, 2013).

Studies have shown that it is not the objective level of grievances, but the *perception and framing of grievances* as unjust and legitimate threats to citizens' wellbeing that fosters political engagement; and the specific, rather than abstract, *attribution of responsibility* for the problematic situation (**injustice**) (Benford & Snow, 2000; Gamson, 1992). Otherwise, grievances may be seen as personal problems leading to a retreat to the private sphere and disengagement. Moreover, literature suggests that grievances are indeed a necessary but insufficient condition for citizen engagement. Alternatively, poor and disadvantaged social groups would be the first to revolt. Research indicates that although the former do revolt occasionally (Piven & Cloward, 1977), it is actually citizens with resources such as time and income that mobilize regularly (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). Grievances are the crisis latent potentials that require mobilization by political actors (party and movement), and political opportunity to be successfully voiced (see Figure 3.2) (Kriesi, 2014; McAdam et al., 2001).

Resource mobilization theory moved the focus of analysis from grievances, which are considered relatively constant in society, to organizational resources and feelings of solidarity among participants as providing motivation for political engagement (Kriesi, 2004). The theory argues that citizens engage in collective action not so much because they feel discontent, but because they possess the resources to do so (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). Mobilization (in my model) refers to citizens' perceptions of the political supply; that is, the presence or absence of political organizations offering opportunities for political engagement. Mobilization can be organized top-down via institutionalized actors such as political parties and state authorities (party politics), or bottom-up through non-institutionalized actors like social movements and solidarity networks (movement politics) (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010). The crises in Europe politicized not only the mobilization of existing actors, but brought new challengers to the

movement and party arenas such as the Indignant and PEGIDA movements, the SYRIZA and AfD challenger parties, solidarity networks and citizen initiatives (Della Porta et al., 2017; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019a; Lahusen & Grasso, 2018).

Kriesi (2014) argues that citizens are more likely to turn to political parties to voice discontent, as party politics is the institutionalized route to political influence that is more accessible and less costly than movement politics. On the other hand, scholars have indicated a certain delegitimization of the electoral arena and a shift towards movement politics, as a consequence of mainstream parties' ideological convergence and diminished representative capacity (Castells, 2012; Della Porta, 2015). My model examines the availability and legitimacy of actors in the movement and party arena aiming to address citizens' grievances in the two countries. As the political process framework underlines, it is not the objective presence of political actors that matters, but the *perception and framing* as appropriate and legitimate agents to voice citizen discontent (**identity**) (Benford & Snow, 2000; Gamson, 1992). In the event that available actors are seen as illegitimate, citizens may express political cynicism and distance themselves from "corrupt politics".

Political opportunity scholars argue that the individualist focus of grievance theories on discontent and the agentic attention of resource mobilization on organizational resources, has downplayed the role of socio-political context and contingency in the emergence of political action (Koopmans, 1999; McAdam et al., 2001). Political opportunity and threat refer to factors in the socio-political context seen as facilitating or impeding social change, such as elections at different levels (local, regional, national, European), protest cycles (Indignados, Occupy, PEGIDA), endogenous and exogenous shocks (austerity, immigration) (Kriesi, 2004). Furthermore, systemic factors in the political opportunity structure like openness of the political system, state strength and repression tactics, divisions and alliances among political elites, and configuration of political actors in the movement and party arena, influence the mobilization and efficacy of political strategies (McAdam et al., 2001). Depending on the closing and opening of political opportunities – for instance the presence of a crisis or timing of elections – citizens may mobilize strategically in these arenas, or disengage if they perceive closure and irresponsiveness.

Not only opportunities but also threats can stimulate citizen engagement especially in crisis times (Kousis, 2017). The concept of threat reintroduces grievances to the political process

framework in an implicit manner. With crises generating threats to citizen well-being, as well as bringing extra-institutional actors in the power play (e.g., the Troika), the stakes in the political arena rise, and citizens may increasingly pursue strategies to influence political outcomes (Della Porta, 2015). Citizens may not only seize existing opportunities (and avoid threats), but they can trigger novel ones with sustained political engagement, as was the case with the Greek referendum in 2015 or the political impasse in the 2017 German elections (Garyfallou, 2020). In line with the politicization of grievances and mobilization of political actors, political opportunities and threats must be *perceived and framed* as such in order to foster engagement (**agency**) (Gamson & Meyer, 1996). If citizens perceive no opportunity to influence politics, they may resort to fatalism and personal adaptation strategies. An important criticism in the literature is that retrospectively almost every aspect of the political context can be considered a(n) opportunity or threat (Koopmans, 1999). Addressing this shortcoming, I rely on citizens' attributions of opportunities and threats instead of taking the latter as a given.

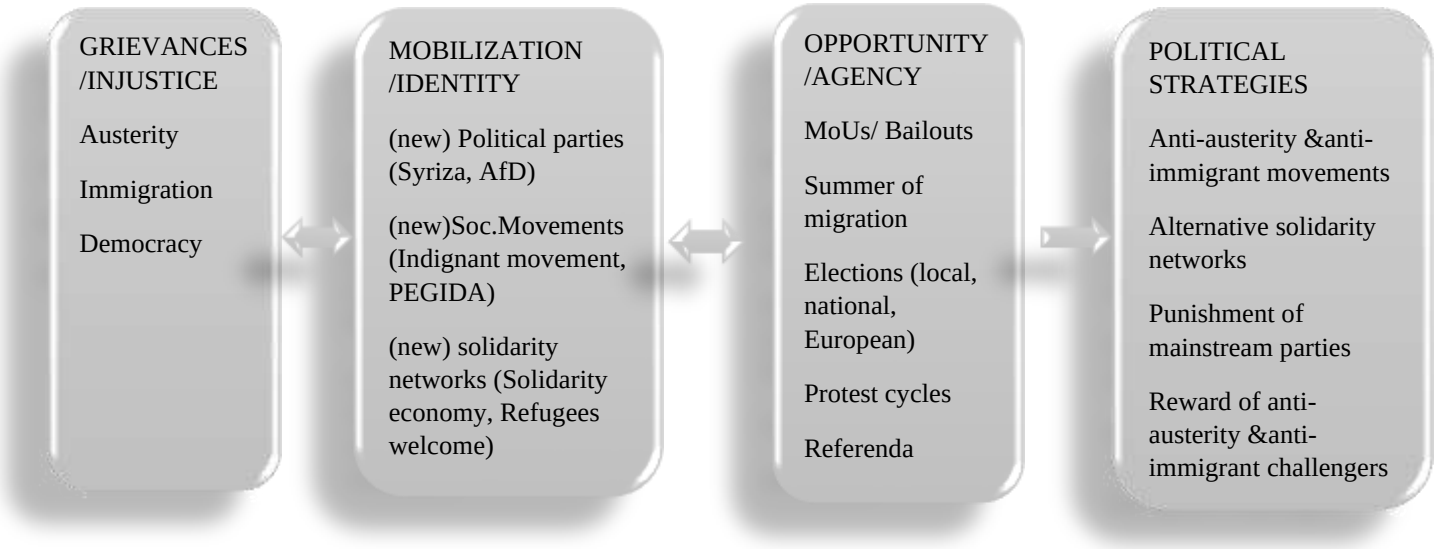


Figure 3.2. A model for the analysis of citizen discourse about political strategies in the Greek and German crises: Perceptions of grievances (injustice), mobilizing actors (identity) and opportunity for action

To sum up, it is expected that the problematization of different grievances (austerity vs. immigration), politicized by distinct political actors (anti-austerity vs. anti-immigrant parties and movements), within a diverse political opportunity structure (debtor vs. creditor, periphery vs. centre) in the two cases shaped citizen discourse about political strategies (see Figure 3.2). In

contrast to grievance and resource mobilization theories that prioritize one of these blocks and in line with the political process framework, the chapter argues that these processes – politicization of grievances, mobilization of actors and appropriation of opportunities – are activated and citizen agency transformed (cognitive liberation) for political action to emerge (Kriesi, 2014; McAdam et al., 2001). Alternatively, citizens are more likely to resort to the private realm and passivity. Contrary to static models measuring attitudes and behaviour intentions with pre-defined questions and answer categories, the proposed analytical framework examines the social construction of political strategies in Greece and Germany through political talk (Schmitt-Beck & Lup, 2013). The latter is approached as a dynamic symbolic space where citizens interact with one another, constructing intersubjective meaning about crises and political strategies. In this sense, it is not the objective presence of grievances, mobilization and opportunity that will be analysed, but citizen discourse about these processes, with a focus on injustice, identity, agency, and alternatives (see Table 3.1).

3.4. Social construction of political strategies

As argued in the previous chapter, political mobilization is facilitated by shared interpretative repertoires that serve specific functions: i) diagnostic (problem identification and responsibility attribution), ii) prognostic (suitable strategies to address the problem) and iii) motivational (legitimate reasons for engaging into action) (Benford & Snow, 2000); or what Gamson (1992) refers to as injustice, identity and agency (see Table 3.1). The diagnostic function defines a situation or the actions of an authority as unjust, and clearly identifies the sources of blame or responsibility for the problematic situation. Boundary formation between the political subjects fighting injustice and the actors seen as responsible for injustice (opponents) is crucial for the transformation of individual identities into politicized collective identities (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). The prognostic function involves the articulation of proposed solutions to the problem and the strategies to achieve it. The better the fit between diagnostic and prognostic functions, the greater the legitimacy and resonance of citizen action (Benford & Snow, 2000). The motivational function provides a "call to arms" for collective action, offering legitimate reasons for political engagement. In the event that citizens do not perceive a problematic situation as unjust, are unable to attribute responsibility to specific actors, fail to construct inclusive

collective identities that resonate with those involved and express legitimate reasons for action, they are unlikely to engage in politics.

Table 3.1 presents the synthesis of the proposed political process framework (see Figure 3.2) with the analytical strategy introduced by Saunders and colleagues (2020) – discourse about issues, discourse about supply, discourse about citizen action. My framework specializes in discourse about "crisis politics", differentiates between supply and opportunity, and contributes "political alternatives" to the model. In particular, it examines political talk about the availability, feasibility and legitimacy of political strategies in the two cases. It focuses on the interplay between the issues that matter for citizens, the political actors considered available and legitimate to address those issues, and the constraints/opportunities in the political environment seen as obstructing or facilitating citizen action.

Social construction of political strategies & Alternatives	**Discourse about grievances:** **Injustice/Blame**	**Discourse about mobilization:** **Identity/Boundaries**	**Discourse about opportunity:** **Agency/Motives**
- Institutions **- Collective** **- Individual** **- Existing action repertoire vs. expansion**	**- Issue** (economy, immigration, democracy) **- Level** (local, national, European, global) **- Specific vs. abstract locus of injustice & responsibility**	**- Politicized collective identities** **- Political subjects vs. opponents** **- Existing vs. novel political actors**	**- Active vs. passive citizenship** **- Efficacy vs. fatalism** **- Reformist vs. revolutionary motives**

Table 3.1. Social construction of political strategies in the Greek and German crises: Discourse about injustice, identity, agency and alternatives

Political strategies refer to citizens' purposeful activities in the party and movement arena deemed as worthwhile to address these problems. The distinction between action by institutions, the general public, and the private individual is useful for the analysis of political strategies (Perrin, 2006; Saunders et al., 2020). Action by institutions involves expectations that public officials can adopt policies to tackle the problems in question, and may be evaluated according to their willingness and efficacy in pursuing these aims (White, 2011). Keeping a balanced budget, tackling unemployment and poverty, and investing in renewable resources are common examples. Collective action refers to citizen mobilization and coordination for a common cause

in the party and movement arena (Klandermans, 2013). Formation of solidarity networks, electoral support of candidates, and organization of strikes and boycotts are typical collective action examples. Individual strategies, on the other hand, involve moves to avoid problems rather than a coordinated effort to resolve them (White, 2011). This approach supposes that certain issues can be addressed only by individual adaptation, such as self-development and individual mobility.

In addition, the novelty of political strategies will be assessed. Critical junctures signify major episodes of institutional innovation at the micro (citizens), meso (organizations) and macro (institutions) levels of the polity. Studies indicate citizen disenchantment with the shortcomings of the (neo)liberal democratic model (Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016), third-way politics (Hobolt & Tilley, 2016), post-democracy and political corruption (Della Porta, 2015). Do citizens discuss new ways of doing politics? Do they envision alternative democratic models? Chapters 4 and 6 discuss citizens' proposed alternatives in Greece and Germany.

3.5. Discourse about grievances: Injustice and blame attribution

Discourse about grievances refers to political talk about those issues considered problematic and threatening to citizens' well-being. When crises emerge, controversies regarding whom or what to blame frequently erupt among the citizenry, the media and politicians (Sommer et al., 2016). Literature suggests that political engagement is more likely when citizens are able to frame their situation as a social and political problem rather than a personal issue (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). This includes identifying the source of injustice precisely. Whether it is the politicians, the EU, capitalism, citizens themselves, refugees or the markets deemed responsible for the crises, is consequential for political strategy. Instead, attributing responsibility to abstract forces such as "the system" or "life" may inspire a sense of fatalism and a retreat to the private sphere (Gamson, 1992). Boin and t'Hart (2001) argue that the politics of crises are politics of blame avoidance. Incumbent governments are more likely to take credit for positive policies, while shifting blame to the opposition or other parties for negative outcomes, as to avoid electoral punishment (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2007). The EU's multilevel governance structure is suggested to facilitate blame avoidance strategies. Domestic politicians are more likely to assume responsibility for positive policy outcomes, while outsourcing blame for unpopular reforms to European institutions (Costa-Lobo & Lewis-Beck, 2012).

Blame avoidance is a common bias in social relations as it presents the speakers and their reference groups in a positive light (Kelley, 1973; Tajfel, 1982). However, it is not the only strategy. Politicians and citizens alike may take responsibility for a problematic situation out of fairness or honesty. On a practical level, identifying the locus of responsibility for a problematic situation is key for tackling the problem in the first place. Roose and colleagues (2017) examined blame attributions in the Greek and German media in the Eurozone crisis and indicated very few instances of blame avoidance in the two cases. My analysis, focusing on citizen discourse about the various crises that emerged in Greece and Germany in 2015-2017, paints a more complex picture. Processes of assuming responsibility *and* shifting blame were identified, the activation of which depended on the problem under discussion (economy, immigration, democracy), level of emergence (local, national, European, global) and multiple actors involved in the crisis management strategy (Troika, government, EU).

3.6. Discourse about mobilization: Identity and boundary formation

Discourse about mobilization is defined as citizens' discussion about political organizations, which offer opportunities for political engagement to address grievances such as political parties, social movements and solidarity networks. Although distinct, political parties, social movements and civic associations are embedded in multi-organizational fields, sharing connections with each other that may be supportive or antagonistic (Klandermans, 2013; McAdam & Tarrow, 2010). With mainstream centrist parties seen as part of the problem (neoliberal convergence, post-democracy, corruption), it is relevant to examine which political actors citizens perceive as available and legitimate to voice their demands. Discursive practices link individuals and groups ideologically, by constructing identities that range from collaborative to conflictual (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Research indicates that it is *politicized collective* and not individual identities that motivate citizens to engage into action (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Politicization of collective identities occurs when citizens consciously engage in power struggles on behalf of their group(s). It is a process that involves awareness of shared grievances, identification of opponent(s), and inclusion of the wider societal context or the general public in political conflict (Baka & Garyfallou, 2011).

By holding people accountable for injustice, citizens engage in boundary formation between those included in the "subjects" category, the protagonists in a crisis situation and their

allies, and those "others" excluded from it, their opponents (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). The subjects are the social groups discussants construct for themselves and others as experiencing a similar predicament in a crisis situation. Allies are possible candidates for engaging in political action to fight injustice. On the other hand, lie the opponents. These are the actors who are explicitly blamed for the problematic situation, and whose behaviour is seen as contributing to the problem (White, 2011). By distinguishing between allies and opponents, citizens attempt to form broad alliances to maximize their power and influence in society. Studies show that constructing inclusive collective identities where diverse groups feel represented – voicing specific demands on which everyone agrees, pursuing strategies seen as legitimate and effective by the majority – is a challenging endeavour (Saunders, 2008).

3.7. Discourse about opportunity: Agency and motive

Discourse about opportunity and agency refers to citizens' evaluations of organizations, institutions and events in the wider societal context that facilitate political engagement. The project approaches structure and agency as dialectically interrelated (Bourdieu, 1989; Sewel, 1992). On the one hand, structures are "sets of chronically reproduced, deeply sedimented rules, resources and networks of relations that constrain and facilitate social action". On the other, citizens are more or less "knowledgeable and skilled users of these rules, resources and networks of relations, so as to reproduce or challenge the social order" (Jessop, 2005: 45). In this sense, actors are constrained and enabled by their environment. They can use ideas and strategies to create and alter institutions by employing practices that legitimize institutional continuity or change (Schmidt, 2014). The proposed change can be radical or moderate. Radical social change indicates a revolutionary rupture and transformation of society. Moderate social change involves reformist, incremental policy action entrusted in politicians and representative institutions. The outcome of social change depends on broad alliances in society, strong social movements, support by institutional actors and political momentum (McAdam et al., 2001; Tarrow, 2011). Critical junctures are periods when radical societal transformations can occur, with both democratizing and de-democratizing outcomes (Collier & Munck, 2017).

According to political and discursive opportunity structure, opportunities and threats ought to be attributed and actively appropriated by political actors to foster mobilization (Gamson & Meyer, 1996; Koopmans & Olzak, 2004). In the event that citizens perceive no opportunities

of influencing the political system either due to diminished efficacy or system irresponsiveness, part of the citizenry may radicalize their strategies in the party and movement arena, while others will disengage (Garyfallou, 2020). Greece and Germany provide exemplary cases where system irresponsiveness and politicians' disregard for popular sentiment triggered polarization of political attitudes and radicalization of political strategies, as will be discussed in Chapter 6.

To recap, the chapter proposes a novel theoretical framework for the analysis of citizen discourse about the availability, efficacy and legitimacy of political strategies in Greece and Germany. As argued, the way crises are discussed in the two cases introduces specific common problems citizens wish to address (discourse about grievances, injustice); brings in particular political actors citizens identify with to address those issues (discourse about mobilization, identity); and opens up certain possibilities for their remedy while closing down others (discourse about opportunity, agency). The following section presents the findings of the research project. Chapter 4, employing survey data, outlines the broad political patterns in Greek and German politics and establishes connections with the focus groups. Chapters 5 and 6 dive into citizen discourse about crises and political strategies, and propose explanatory mechanisms for the suggested processes in the two cases.

Chapter 4. Perceptions of crises, evaluations of political institutions and democratic quality, political strategies and democratic alternatives in Greece and Germany. Evidence from the POLPART survey.

The empirical analysis begins with the POLPART survey aiming to establish the broader generalizable picture in Greek and German politics. The chapter examines the salient issues that trigger crisis perceptions in society, citizen self-reported engagement in movement and party politics, and plausible alternatives to the post-democratic crisis of representation. The survey analysis provides the basis for the more complex focus group examination. Survey research offers a representative yet descriptive view of citizens' attitudes towards politics, because it fails to shed light onto their own ideas and meaning-making processes when discussing politics (Saunders & Klandermans, 2020). Focus groups, on the other hand, offer a comprehensive approach to citizens' motivations and justifications for these attitudes, but they are not representative of the general population as only a limited number of sessions can be conducted and analysed (Kruger & Casey, 2014). The two methods are considered complementary in this project, since they offer insights onto structures and processes in the two cases that neither method alone could provide (Denzin, 2010). General statistics (means, measures of association) about broader political patterns are coupled with brief segments of focus group interpretative repertoires, to highlight the overlap between the two methods. In Chapters 5 and 6, I establish explanatory mechanisms for citizens' crisis perceptions and selection of political strategies in further detail.

As the project's centre of attention is on citizen discourse about lived experience with crisis politics, I use survey data to test the broader commonality and applicability of the focus group findings – a quality of quantitative research that is not normally assured in this way. Employing survey data from a representative sample collected in 2017, the chapter addresses the following questions: *Which issues trigger crisis perceptions in the two cases? How do Greek and German citizens evaluate politicians and institutions, and how satisfied are they with democracy as it currently functions in the country and Europe? Which political strategies in the movement and party arenas do they engage in and how do they evaluate alternatives to the post-democratic crisis of representation? Overall, to what extent does the survey analysis resonate with the focus*

group examination? What are the implications for the interpretation of findings (quantitative and qualitative), their broader commonality and applicability?

The chapter starts with citizens' ranking of the most important issues in society, followed by economic and income satisfaction, assessment of immigration, trust in political institutions and evaluations of democratic quality. It continues with a summary of citizens' political strategies in the party and movement arenas, followed by specifics on voting behaviour, protest politics and civic engagement. Attitudes towards democratic alternatives will be discussed last.

4.1. Crisis perceptions

4.1.1. Most important issues in society

Citizens in Greece and Germany were asked to select the three most important issues in society from the list in Table 4.1. As the table shows, by far the most important issues in 2017 in Greece were austerity-related such as unemployment, poverty and taxation. 64%, 40% and 40% of Greek respondents respectively answered that these issues were most crucial in contrast to 11%, 25% and 12% of German respondents. Healthcare (30%), immigration (24%) and corruption (23%) score also high among the Greeks (in contrast to 13%, 48% and 6% among the Germans) related to the financial, immigration and political crises discussed in the focus groups.

Table 4.1. Most important issues in Greece and Germany[10]

Most important Issues in society	Greece	Germany
Unemployment	64%	11%
Poverty	40%	25%
Taxation	40%	12%
Healthcare	30%	13%
Immigration	24%	48%
Corruption	23%	6%
Education	20%	26%
Political system	19%	11%
Inflation	13%	20%

[10] The significance tests can be found in Table A4.1, Appendix.

Pensions	10%	26%
Crime	9%	20%
Environment	3%	24%
Housing	2%	15%
Terrorism	1%	36%
Gender Inequality	1%	5%
	(N=1120)	(N=1110)

During the same period, Germany's most problematic issues related to immigration and terrorism. 48% and 36% of German respondents referred to those issues as most important in society compared to 24% and 1% of Greek respondents. Concerns over social security such as education (26%), pensions (26%) and poverty (25%) score high too among the Germans (compared to 20%, 10% and 40% among the Greeks), indicating that economic grievances were present, yet not as politicized as cultural threats. Environmental issues (24%) were also visible in Germany (in contrast to 3% in Greece) reflecting the significant legacy of the Green movement and possibly coinciding with the onset of yet another crisis – climate change.

Therefore, an environment of multiple threats is reflected in the survey data. However, the predominant issues triggering crisis perceptions differ in the two cases, namely, the economy and politics in Greece, immigration and politics in Germany. Focus group participants in Greece portrayed the generalized, multiple crises and their psychological effects on the population as "national depression". As a result of austerity measures and budget cuts, citizens lack basic welfare provision in education, healthcare, housing and employment, filling them with insecurity and fear for the future.

> *Stamatis: Ok apart from the financial problem, there is sadness, depression I'd call it.*
>
> *Vivi: Yes, we see it also with the rise in drug addiction in the country.*
>
> *Vivi: Also, in the healthcare sector, there's a serious lack of medicine and doctors in the hospitals.*
>
> *Athanasia: Education is also underfunded*
>
> *Makis: Basically, we start with the economy, and we discuss each public sector, because they all depend on the economy.* *(Greece, 26-40HE)*

In Germany on the other hand, focus group participants discussed the "refugee crisis" and the issue of "integration" as threats that triggered serious concerns and fear for the future. Participants seemed overwhelmed by an "invasion of foreigners" – "they are too many" they said repeatedly, after Chancellor Merkel announced that the country will receive 1.5 million refugees in 2015.

> *Jennifer: At the moment I think it's the breeding ground for everything terrible, because people are working with fear on all sides. I must honestly say that I'm a bit afraid of the near future.*
>
> *Sascha: And detailed information is missing. So it's nice that Mrs Merkel stands up and says: We can do it, without offering any solutions… And we already had foreigners [in the past], that includes my background, and a lot went wrong. Now we're starting over again and we have the opportunity to do it right this time, but no there's no way. (Germany, 41-60LE)*

In both countries, crises trigger politics of fear. Participants portray an environment of major material and symbolic threats. In Greece, crisis perceptions have mainly a material basis of "survival", whereas in Germany they relate to post-material threats to "life quality". These threats trigger crisis perceptions to the extent that a majority of citizens feels affected, while politicians seem unable to tackle these issues effectively.

4.1.2. Economic situation and income satisfaction

Indicative of the severity of the financial crisis in Greece, dramatic differences emerged when citizens were asked about their financial situation (see Table 4.2), personal and country specific, in the last and next 12 months. The default choice for the majority of Greek respondents was "it is/will be worse", whereas for most German respondents was "it is/will be the same". Lack of hope for the future marks its presence in Greece, while stability is expected in Germany.

Table 4.2. Evaluations of economic situation in Greece and Germany

Economic situation (1=better, 2=same, 3=worse)	**Greece**	**Germany**
Last 12 months, country's economy	74% (worse)	48% (same)
Next 12 months, country's economy	64% (worse)	53% (same)
Last 12 months, personal financial situ	68% (worse)	50% (same)
Next 12 months, personal financial situ	51% (worse)	51% (same)
X^2 (1,2230) = 781.76, p<.001	(N=1120)	(N=1110)

In line with "economic situation" evaluations, income satisfaction (see Table 4.3) followed a similar pattern in the two cases. In Germany 38% of respondents reported living comfortably, 35% coping and only 12% expressed difficulty with current income. Contrary, in Greece 42% of respondents appeared to be in a difficult situation and 24% expressed extreme difficulty in making ends meet, while only 29% appeared to be coping with current income. That is, 66% of Greek participants in the sample reported that they are struggling to get by with current income compared to 19% of German participants. On the other hand, whereas 46% of the Germans reported living comfortably with current income, only 6% of the Greeks reported the same. Self-reported unemployment rate in the sample was 24% in Greece and 5% in Germany, while minimum wage reached 700 euros in Greece compared to 1500 euros in Germany (OECD). Greek focus group participants suggested that in reality wages are even lower, with exploitation and underemployment becoming the norm.

Table 4.3. Income satisfaction in Greece and Germany

Income satisfaction (1=not all, 5=very much)	**Greece**	**Germany**
Living very comfortably	1%	8%
Living comfortably	5%	38%
Coping	29%	35%
Difficult	42%	12%
Very difficult	24%	7%
X^2 (1,2230) = 339.34, p<.001	(N=1120)	(N=1110)

Statistics are in line with the focus groups. In Greece, discussants introduced a particular interpretative repertoire, "mode of survival", to narrate their precarious financial situation, personal and country-specific. Every time the Greek government signs a bailout agreement with the European partners (three MoUs by 2015), citizens become poorer due to extended wage and pension cuts as well as tax increases being conditional to signing these agreements. Austerity was described as "forced poverty" imposed on the population by corrupt and irresponsible politicians.

> *Mihalis: What I am saying is that when you earned 1500euros it wasn't a matter of sustenance, but of life quality – well now that you end up getting 500euros and you're in danger to go to 400euros, you don't have life quality anymore. When one doesn't have food to eat, really, I don't think they care, they get into survival mode.* *(Greece, 18-25HE)*

Contrary, German discussants acknowledged their powerful position in Europe and wealth in the country. They narrated threats to "life quality" and to Germany's leading role in the world economy, but did not construct a crisis per se.

> *Konstantin: I believe a little bit us Germans, now, we are doing well insofar as we have something to eat, we have something to drink, we drive a car, we have a mobile phone, why should we change anything? Many people think so, they don't have serious problems... (Germany, 41-60LE)*

In times of crisis German focus group participants raised concerns with keeping up their good performance. They introduced a notion of relative deprivation. Compared to southern Europeans their economic evaluations were optimistic. In comparison to Scandinavian citizens or past times, however, they felt they lagged behind. Participants in both countries were fond of the Scandinavian social democratic model, which in their view offered all citizens a basic level of economic and social security.

4.1.3. Evaluations of immigration

Immigration was evaluated negatively in both countries, as average scores were below the midpoint (5.5) of the 11-point evaluative scale. In Greece the effects of immigration on the economy, cultural life and life quality were rated roughly 0.8 lower than Germany, possibly due to the ongoing recession. Greek citizens lost 25% of their GDP since the onset of the financial crisis in 2010. This finding is in line with Eurobarometer longitudinal data indicating that the Greeks score lower on support for globalization and immigration compared to the Germans due to the country's modest economy, and limited experience with mass immigration and multiculturalism (Triandafyllidou, 2020). In the focus groups, whereas German participants problematized the issue of immigration, Greek participants discussed the problem of emigration, especially for the youth.

Table 4.4. Evaluations of immigration in Greece and Germany

Immigration	**Greece**	**Germany**	***T-test, sig***
(0=bad, 10=good)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
For the economy	4,1 (2,8)	5,0 (2,7)	*t(2228) = 8.52, p=.002*
For cultural life	4,1 (2,9)	4,9 (2,9)	*t(2228) = 7.17, p=.006*
For the country in general	3,6 (2,7)	4,4 (2,8)	*t(2228) = 7.07, p=.001*
	(N=1120)	(N=1110)	

Immigration and the refugee crisis were perceived as serious international problems in both countries. In Greece immigration was discussed as *contributing* to the financial and political crises, since focus group participants acknowledged that refugees target more stable and wealthy economies to settle with their families. There was a tendency to "identify with the weak" as participants perceived themselves to be powerless in Europe. They felt disproportionally affected by the refugee crisis located at the southern border of Europe.

> *Vivi: Yet Greece has a very specific role in the European Union, because we receive refugees, and this has to do with Europe's interests. So, the situation in the country becomes even more complicated.*
>
> *Makis: But they don't want to stay here, they only see it as a passage.*
>
> *Vivi: Yes, but how easy is it for them to leave Greece?*
>
> *Makis: Not at all since other countries have closed their borders… and they don't care what happens to them or us, they are like "[since] you are there, you'll receive them now". (Greece, 26-40HE)*

In Germany focus group participants described the refugee crisis as *triggering* the crisis situation when Chancellor Merkel announced that the country will receive 1.5 million refugees without considering public opinion on the matter. Discussants appeared sympathetic to refugees' troubled life stories. However, they felt threatened by a potential "cultural clash" between the locals and the foreigners, expressing fears of political and religious radicalization. They also indicated their annoyance at not being asked about this important political decision that would affect future generations.

> *Doris: Yes, you can't do anything yourself, you're not even asked. Merkel says: we can do it, the question is though, do we want it? So many people think they don't want it.*
>
> *Armin: I think you're absolutely right. I personally think it's ruining our country. We can't make it. 1.5 million, it's madness! I have nothing against foreigners, but they are too many. And we are not responsible for the Syrian civil war either, there must be an end somewhere. (Germany, 26-40LE)*

Based on the survey data we would expect more xenophobia and negative views towards refugees expressed in Greece compared to Germany. This would be in line with studies suggesting that Greece is a relatively intolerant society, because it lacks the institutional framework for migrant integration compared to advanced European democracies (Galariotis et al., 2017). However, the focus groups indicate otherwise. Processes of responsibility attribution for the problematic situation and mechanisms of identification and othering play a significant role in the social construction of the refugee crisis as will be shown in Chapter 5.

4.1.4. Trust in political institutions and evaluations of democratic quality

Moving on to indicators of political crisis in the two countries, Greek and German participants' trust in politicians and institutions (see Table 4.5) was poorly rated, well below the mid-point (3.0) of the 5-point scale, with the exception of German courts (3.1) and police (3.4). Political trust in Greece was evaluated on average one point lower than Germany. Politicians and parties (Greece: 1.4, 1.4 and Germany: 2.4, 2.2) received the lowest scores in both countries followed by the government (1.6 vs. 2.6 respectively), the media (1.7 vs. 2.6) and banks/corporations (1.9 vs. 2.4). Political trust in the European Parliament is similarly low (2.1 vs. 2.5). This pattern is generally supported by Eurobarometer longitudinal data. The Greeks tend to trust the European parliament (2.1) more than the country's parliament and government (1.6, 1.6 respectively), with domestic politicians considered corrupt and responsible for the financial and political meltdown. In Germany the opposite pattern appears. Citizens traditionally report higher trust in the country's parliament (2.7) and federal government (2.6) than the European Parliament (2.5). However, these differences have become marginal also in Germany (0.1), indicating a crisis of political trust at the national and European level.

Table 4.5. Political trust in Greece and Germany

Political trust (1=no trust, 5=complete trust)	**Greece** Mean (SD)	**Germany** Mean (SD)	***T-test Sig***
European parliament	2,1 (1,0)	2,5 (1,1)	*t(2228) = 10.10, p=.03*
The government	1,6 (0,9)	2,6 (1,1)	*t(2228) = 27.29, p<.001*
The parliament	1,6 (0,9)	2,7 (1,1)	*t(2228) = 26.77, p<.001*
Local council	2,1 (1,0)	2,9 (1,0)	*t(2228) = 20.23, p=.009*
Courts	2,6 (1,1)	3,1 (1,1)	*t(2228) = 12.31, p<.001*
Trade unions	1,9 (1,0)	2,9 (1,0)	*t(2228) = 25.19, p<.001*
Police	2,7 (1,1)	3,4 (1,0)	*t(2228) = 17.15, p=.004*
Politicians	1,4 (0,7)	2,2 (1,0)	*t(2228) = 26.18, p<.001*
Political parties	1,4 (0,7)	2,4 (1,0)	*t(2228) = 28.40, p<.001*
Banks/corporations	1,9 (0,9)	2,4 (1,0)	*t(2228) = 13.75, p<.001*
Media	1,7 (0,8)	2,6 (1,0)	*t(2228) = 25.32, p<.001*

	(N=1120)	(N=1110)

Although the crises in Greece and Germany were triggered by different issues (the economy and immigration respectively), the political crisis of democratic representation underlying these crises, was portrayed in surprisingly similar ways. Focus group participants introduced particular interpretative repertoires, "puppets of the economy" and "money-oriented politics", to describe the close relationship between politicians and business interests (post-democracy, Crouch, 2004). A common repertoire referred to politicians being too far away from the "little people", yet very close to "moneyed interests".

> *Liza: Great disappointment. Not only with politics in Greece, but also in Europe. I grew up with the word "austerity" since I was a kid. I'm getting old and I hear this word again, it's imposed on me to live in austerity. And this austerity is worse than the austerity I encountered when I was a kid. In the 1950s and 1960s there were the poor and the rich. So, some people thought that the poor shouldn't become middle class, there's no need. Hence, I don't believe politicians. Nobody. I don't believe that any of them loves their country so much as to improve the situation.* *(Greece, 61+LE)*

> *Konrad: The question is, where do they live, what do they eat, where do they move, what are they afraid of? I refer to all topics now, TTIP is just an example. I think the federal government is trapped in lobbyists' associations; I don't want to say now puppets of the economy but this is the direction.*

> *Ingrid: You notice that when someone from the political life loses his/her post in the Bundestag or is retired, they somehow end up in the economy, as advisors or something.* *(Germany, 41-60HE)*

Overall, satisfaction with the way democracy functions in the country was low. In Germany (5.0) scores reached almost the mid-point of the 11-point scale in a country that is generally considered a mature democracy and only slightly affected by the crises. In Greece, as expected, scores were extremely low (2.6).

Table 4.6. Satisfaction with democracy in Greece and Germany

Democratic satisfaction (0=not at all, 10=very much)	**Greece** Mean (SD)	**Germany** Mean (SD)	***T-test, Sig***
	2,6 (2,3)	5,0 (2,5)	*t(2228) = 25.72, p<.001*
	(N=1120)	(N=1110)	

Specific assessments of democratic quality are presented in Table 4.7. The scale includes four items for satisfaction with liberal democracy (free and fair elections, parties' representative

function, free media, rule of law), one item for satisfaction with social democracy (protection against poverty) and two items for satisfaction with participatory and direct democracy (public deliberative meetings and referenda). Democratic evaluations refer to the assessment of these qualities as they currently function in the country. Democratic aspirations indicate the importance of these qualities as normative ideals for a well-functioning democracy. The notion of democratic deficit refers to the discrepancy between citizens' aspirations of democracy and actual application in real life (Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016; Norris, 2011). The democratic deficit score is calculated by subtracting democratic aspirations from democratic evaluations.

Table 4.7. Evaluations of democratic quality and democratic deficit in Greece and Germany[11]

Democratic quality (0=not at all, 10=very much)	**Evaluations** Mean (SD)	**Aspirations** Mean (SD)	**Democratic deficit** (eval-asp)	**Evaluations** Mean (SD)	**Aspirations** Mean (SD)	**Democratic deficit** (eval-asp)
	Greece			**Germany**		
Free and fair elections	6,0 (2,9)	8,9 (1,9)	-2,9	7,2 (2,6)	8,2 (2,1)	-1,0
Media are free to criticize the government	4,3 (3,1)	8,4 (2,3)	-3,9	7,1 (2,5)	8,2 (2,1)	-1,1
Political parties offer alternatives	3,4 (2,6)	8,0 (2,3)	-4,6	5,3 (2,3)	6,9 (2,1)	-1,6
Courts treat everyone the same	2,8 (2,8)	9,1 (1,8)	-6,3	5,5 (2,8)	8,4 (2,1)	-2,9
Citizens voting in referenda	2,5 (2,8)	8,0 (2,3)	-5,5	3,8 (3,0)	7,3 (2,3)	-3,5
Government protects citizens against poverty	2,0 (2,4)	9,0 (1,8)	-7,0	4,4 (2,8)	7,8 (2,2)	-3,4
Citizens can participate in public meetings	2,3 (2,4)	8,0 (2,2)	-5,7	5,8 (2,7)	7,8 (2,1)	-2,0
	(N=1120)			**(N=1110)**		

Democratic evaluations were very low in Greece and low in Germany. Even the minimum of liberal democratic requirements such as equality before the law (Greece: 2.8, Germany: 5.5), parties' representative function (3.4 vs. 5.3 respectively) and competitive elections (6.0 vs. 7.2) were rated poorly in the two cases. Scores were even lower when citizens were asked about social and participatory democratic elements, like poverty reduction (Greece: 2.0 vs. Germany: 4.4) and

[11] The significance tests can be found in Table A4.7, Appendix.

organization of referenda on important political decisions (2.5 vs. 3.8). All items on democratic aspirations were rated higher in Greece than Germany, indicating possibly an idealized notion of democracy in the former vis-à-vis a more pragmatic conceptualization in the latter (Colvin & Taplin, 2015; Held, 2006). It could also be that the legitimacy crisis is so dire in Greece that participants underline the importance of these prerequisites for a healthy democracy. Democratic aspirations rated highest in Greece were equality before the law (9.1 out of 10), poverty protection (9.0) and free and fair elections (8.9); whereas in Germany were equality before the law (8.4 out of 10), free media (8.2), and free and fair elections (8.2).

The lowest scoring democratic evaluations in Greece emerged in poverty protection (2.0 out of 10), public deliberative meetings (2.3), participation in referenda (2.5) and equality before the law (2.8). In Germany they appeared in participation in referenda (3.8 out of 10), poverty protection (4.4), parties' representative function (5.3) and equality before the law (5.5). The recurrent focus on poverty protection in Greece highlights the extent of the financial crisis. Poverty protection emerged as an important issue also in Germany, while calls for justice and equality were present in both countries. The crisis of representation marked its presence, with inclusion of citizens' preferences in the political arena via parties, referenda and public deliberative meetings scoring lowest among democratic evaluations in both cases.

The difference in evaluations of democratic quality between the two countries is roughly two to three points on a 11-point scale, which is telling of the democratic deficit reported in Greece. The democratic deficit scale indicated negative performance scores between three and seven points in Greece, while one and three fifty in Germany. These rates mirror the focus group data, suggesting "major delegitimization" of the political system in Greece. The two mainstream labour and conservative parties that governed the country for 35 years were portrayed as "traitors" with their involvement in the Eurozone statistics scandal. Practices of "corruption and clientelism" were condemned for causing democratic degeneration. Focus group participants were also dissatisfied with European democracy. SYRIZA's U-turn on austerity made them believe that "foreign powers" control the political system.

> *Anna: I believe that not even these people govern Greece, everything comes from higher levels. PM Tsipras [prime minister at the time and leader of SYRIZA] organized the referendum, I really believed in him, even though I didn't vote for him. He triggered hope. Definitely they didn't let him follow the NO vote [61.3% voted NO to more austerity].*

Vivi: Yes, he had a problem

Anna: Neither Greece has the final word, nor political leaders *(Greece, 26-40HE)*

Focus group participants in Germany expressed also dissatisfaction with federal and European democracy, arguing that they were "disproportionally burdened" with the crises in Europe. Contrary to Greece, where the political crisis emerged already in 2010, Germany was entering a political crisis in 2015. Severe criticism was directed towards the political class for mismanaging the Eurozone (bailouts) and refugee crises, while falling short of alternatives among political parties (crisis of representation). Its surviving status in the financial crisis may have prevented a generalized crisis of legitimacy.

Susanne: So, I'm going to vote, but I feel so shaken every time, because in principle it's always the same in power anyway, it's always about the two, the SPD and the CDU. So, I think whether I vote now or not, the result is almost always identical, with a few deviations.

Anton: In foreign policy, most of them in the case of Greece, with the refugees, are now in agreement, the Greens, FDP, SPD and CDU they all agree. *(Germany, 26-40HE)*

The financial, refugee and political crises, their characteristics and consequences, will be elaborated further in Chapter 5.

4.2. Political strategies

4.2.1. Political strategies in the party and movement arena

According to the critical juncture literature, crises are periods of intense political mobilization triggered by the severity of threats – material, symbolic and political – to citizens' wellbeing and life quality. Therefore, as regards political strategies, Greek and German respondents appeared overall active in politics. In contrast to mainstream theories of political participation (post-materialism and resource mobilization theories, Inglehart, 1997; McCarty & Zald, 1977) and in line with critical juncture literature (Della Porta, 2015; Roberts, 2015), the Greeks reported higher engagement in politics (10%-20%) than the Germans (see Table 4.8), in an attempt to alter their desperate situation (more grievances and threats, less resources and opportunities). This is the case when asked about political participation 'ever' as well as 'in the past 12 months'. It is important to point out that the 'ever' data includes popular mobilizations during the anti-austerity contentious cycle (2011) and the long summer of migration (2015). The 'last 12 months' coincided with the German federal elections (2017).

Indicative of the intensity of mobilization in Greece, focus group participants reflected explicitly on the possibility of "revolution" (nothing to lose strategy). On the other hand, in line with the culture of moderation in Germany after experiences with radicalism in the past, participants discussed "reform" and distanced themselves from radical social change to retain their strong position in Europe (much to lose strategy).

> *Manos: My opinion is that we are trying to change something which is overall wrong. With small alterations the situation does not change, there needs to be a revolutionary/fundamental change of the system. I think we rely on a value system that has been imposed on us. (Greece, 26-40LE)*

> *Alexander*: *I believe it simply takes a certain amount of suffering to get out of your comfort zone, and many people [in Germany] don't have that pain, they're fine, they have a secure job. For example, if I don't kill anyone, I will be able to work until retirement, I earn well, I don't have to get involved.*
> *(Germany, 41-60HE)*

Back to the survey data, the largest differences in the use of political strategies in the two countries (see Table 4.8) appeared in voting in national ('last 12 months – ever' Greece: 78%-84% vs. Germany: 65%-71%) and European elections (GR: 62%-63% vs. DE: 46%-50%); participating in referenda (GR: 14%-75% vs. DE: 8%-30%); boycotting (GR: 38%-51% vs. DE: 20%-29%); demonstrating (GR: 19%-45% vs. DE: 6%-19%) and striking (GR: 16%-32% vs. DE: 2%-11%), with half or more than half of Greek respondents reporting political engagement. As the Greek focus groups indicated, these differences were driven by participation in massive strikes before signing the first MoU in 2010, the anti-austerity Indignant movement in 2011, electoral punishment of mainstream parties and reward of challengers in the 2012, 2014 (European) and 2015 elections, and the referendum on EU/austerity in 2015.

Table 4.8. Political strategies in the movement and party arena in Greece and Germany[12]

Political strategies	**Ever**	**Last 12 months**	**Efficacy** (1-5 scale) Mean (SD)	**Ever**	**Last 12 months**	**Efficacy** (1-5 scale) Mean (SD)
	Greece			**Germany**		
Vote	84%	78%	3,2 (1,4)	71%	65%	3,4 (1,2)
Referenda	75%	14%	2,8 (1,4)	30%	8%	3,4 (1,2)
EU vote	63%	62%	3,1 (1,4)	50%	46%	3,1 (1,2)
Boycott	51%	38%	2,9 (1,4)	29%	20%	2,9 (1,3)

[12] The significance tests can be found in Table A4.8, Appendix.

Demonstration	45%	19%	2,6 (1,3)	19%	6%	2,7 (1,2)
Petition	40%	20%	2,7 (1,2)	47%	23%	3,1 (1,2)
Strike	32%	16%	2,8 (1,3)	11%	2%	2,6 (1,2)
Social media	22%	14%	1,1 (1,2)	12%	7%	1,2(1,1)
Town hall meeting	20%	9%	2,5 (1,3)	15%	6%	2,9 (1,2)
Contacting	15%	7%	2,0 (1,1)	12%	5%	2,4 (1,2)
	(N=1120)			(N=1110)		

On the other hand, political action in Germany reached moderate levels. Voting ('12months – ever': 65%-71%), petitioning (23%-47%), boycotting (20%-29%) and participation in state referenda (8%-30%) featured as common strategies among German respondents, aiming at addressing particular issues instead of the political system as a whole. The popular anti-TTIP petition and demonstration, refugee welcoming initiatives, PEGIDA protests, the Tempelhof and Waterworks[13] referenda were examples of political mobilization participants referred to in the focus groups. Contacting politicians in both countries ('last 12 months – ever' Greece: 7%-15%, Germany: 5%-12%) fared particularly low, signifying distance and distrust between citizens and politicians. Social media usage for political purposes was relatively low in both countries (GR: 14%-22% vs. DE: 7%-12%), while striking in Germany (2%-11%) seems to be a relatively rare strategy compared to Greece (16%-32%).

On the efficacy of political strategies, the Germans appeared slightly more confident that political action can have an impact in society than the Greeks, especially about voting (Germany: 3.4 vs. Greece: 3.2), referenda (3.4 vs. 2.8) and petitioning (3.1 vs. 2.7). Political consumerism and boycotting (2.9) featured prominently in both cases and emerged as a common strategy in the focus groups. Social media usage was evaluated as relatively ineffective (1.2 for the Germans, 1.1 for the Greeks). However, the differences between the two countries are marginal (0.1 to 0.4) and scores are close or below the mid-point of the 5-point scale (3.0), which indicates a certain scepticism that citizen action may actually be effective. Lack of responsiveness to citizens'

[13] Transformation of former airport into recreational space and re-municipalitization of water provision previously owned by private companies.

demands and the increasing gap between politicians and the citizenry may explain this finding, as will be discussed in the focus group analysis.

4.2.2. Vote intentions and election results

Regarding vote intentions in the next elections (see Table 4.9), mainstream centre-left and centre-right parties were losing ground, while challenger parties on the left and the right were winning votes in both countries. In Greece the once dominant labour party PASOK collapsed (and rebranded itself as KINAL) after its involvement in the Eurozone statistics scandal. The radical left party SYRIZA took its place in the 2012 and 2015 elections winning vote majority; yet it lost popular support after the U-turn on the EU/austerity referendum in 2015. The mainstream conservative party New Democracy lost voters with its involvement in the Eurozone statistics scandal, while challengers on the far right (Golden Dawn) attracted part of its electorate.

Likewise, the mainstream conservative and labour parties in Germany were counting losses due to their grand coalitions (GroCo) and similar political positions in the financial and refugee crises. The centre-left labour SPD lost support for adopting neoliberal austerity policies in 2002-2005 and forming grand coalitions with the centre-right conservative CDU. The latter dissatisfied its electorate with the bailout agreements in 2010-2015 and the liberal refugee policy in 2015. The radical right (AfD), the Greens (Die Grünen) and the radical left (Die Linke) were gaining votes in our sample, which indicates that processes of polarization and radicalization were emerging also in Germany.

Table 4.9. Vote intentions in Greece and Germany

Vote intentions (Greece)		**(Germany)**	
New Democracy	13%	CDU/CSU	19%
SYRIZA	9%	SPD	15%
Golden Dawn	7%	Die Linke	10%
KKE	5%	AfD	9%
KINAL (ex-PASOK)	3%	Die Grünen	7%
Union of Centrists	2%	FDP	6%
IDK	26% (13% blank)	IDK	14% (7% blank)
(N=1120)		(N=1110)	

Electoral dealignment and realignment in Germany was relatively moderate compared to Greece. Major restructuration of the Greek party system took place, with electoral punishment of mainstream parties and reward of challengers occurring already in the critical elections of 2012 and 2015. Self-reported electoral volatility was particularly high in Greece as well as undecided and abstaining voters (roughly 45% compared to 25% in Germany) after SYRIZA's U-turn on austerity. Elections were also scheduled far in advance in 2019. Focus group participants suggested that Greek citizens wanted "a real political change" with SYRIZA, a party that openly supported and engaged in anti-austerity mobilizations in 2010-2015. Yet, system irresponsiveness to citizens' demands and the betrayal of the parliamentary left's anti-austerity promises, led left-leaning citizens to disappointment and disengagement, while right-wing sympathizers started mobilizing again.

> *Ionas: I think there is disappointment now, because citizens tried their last chance with SYRIZA, people that didn't want to react violently [to the crisis]. They wanted to act lawfully by the Constitution, in elections, and they decided they wanted a real change, and they lost. All this disappointment has numbed them now. […] A whole society of active citizens is shocked as a matter of fact. Because it's the very active citizens that turn to the centre-left and the left, these are the people that participate most in politics.*
>
> *Akis: There's also activism on the other side, not only on the left. Because it's activism, we just don't agree with it. (Greece, 41-60HE)*

In Germany focus group participants in 2015 were contemplating economic voting strategies, which they put into effect in the state (Länder) and 2017 federal elections. The country seems to be facing also a political crisis. Punishment of mainstream parties and reward of challengers was discussed as a first step for citizens to express their dissatisfaction with consensus centrist politics and the lack of alternative party positions on the crises after two grand coalitions in 2005 and 2013. German discussants expressed concern rather than approval over the rise of the radical right in the country. Yet, a common repertoire indicated that part of their demands with respect to relative control over immigration may be legitimate.

> *Armin: It really needs a big bang, otherwise nothing happens. I wish in the next election that both people's parties are punished, that they both get 15% so that they understand what's going on, otherwise it will eventually end in civil war and chaos, it cannot go on like this. I wish that they both are punished. I hope, of course, that the (radical) right does not get more votes.*
>
> *Doris: But I think it's [elections] not enough, it needs to be more frequent, because at the moment there are many issues on which many people would like to express their opinion somehow. (Germany, 41-60HE)*

Vote intentions in our sample are supported by actual election results (see Table 4.10). Naturally, the percentage of undecided and blank votes fell considerably in both countries.

Electoral turnout was very low in Greece (58%), where voting is compulsory, compared to Germany (76%), indicating an ongoing crisis of legitimacy.

Table 4.10. Election results in Greece and Germany

Election results (Greece, 2019)		**(Germany, 2017)**	
New Democracy	40%	CDU/CSU	33%
SYRIZA	32%	SPD	21%
KINAL (ex-PASOK)	8%	AfD	13%
KKE	5%	FDP	11%
Greek Solution	4%	Die Linke	9%
MeRA25	3,5%	Die Grünen	9%
Turnout	**58%**	**Turnout**	**76%**

In both countries, punishment of mainstream parties and reward of challengers is observed. Electoral punishment of labour parties is harsher than the conservatives due to the former's neoliberal convergence. In the 2017 German elections, another fragile grand coalition between the mainstream parties CDU (33%) and SPD (21%) was formed, yet with both losing votes to challenger parties. The new radical right party AfD climbed to third place (13%), receiving the highest increase in votes in the German parliament. It was followed by the free market FDP (11%), the radical left Die Linke (9%) and the Greens Die Grünen (9%).

In the 2019 Greek elections, left-wing SYRIZA (32%) lost to conservative New Democracy (40%) after disappointing its anti-austerity progressive electorate, but has replaced the once dominant labour PASOK (rebranded as KINAL) that only came third (8%). The far-right party Golden Dawn collapsed under criminal investigations and was replaced by a new moderate nationalist party Greek Solution (4%). The Communist Party (KKE) remained stable at 5%, while a new anti-austerity radical left party with European orientation, MeRA25/DiEM25 (3.5%) entered the parliament.

4.2.3. Participation in demonstrations

In the movement arena (see Table 4.8), self-reported participation in demonstrations was moderate in Germany (6% last 12 months, 19% ever). Empowering experiences with the

environmental and anti-nuclear movement in the 1970s–1980s, and the Monday protests in 1989 that brought the fall of the Berlin Wall were common examples of "the power of the people". Participants suggested that engaging in demonstrations can be an effective strategy when politicians disregard citizen discontent and crucial issues are not addressed in the parliament, as was the case with the massive anti-TTIP demonstration and the PEGIDA protests.

> *Doris: I'm not a member of PEGIDA or so, but there are many people who are afraid at the moment and some just overreact and shift completely to the right… And those that have good ideas about the TTIP and the like, I don't know whether politicians really listen to their demands*
>
> *Ana: Well, I see that demonstrations serve to politicize people… and well, they don't necessarily need to be directed at politicians, but at the broader [societal] context. They appear in the media and make sure that the topic gets big.* *(Germany, 26-40LE)*

In Greece, participation in demonstrations (19% last 12 months – 45% ever) emerged as a relatively common practice. Social movement mobilization is related to successful outcomes (resistance, revolution) in the country's political history. Common examples participants referred to were the Independence movement during the Turkish occupation, the Resistance movement in World War II, the overthrow of the military coup in 1974 by the Student movement, and the anti-austerity Indignant movement in 2011.

> *Giannis: Out of all the demonstrations I remember the only massive demonstration that scared politicians was the situation with the Indignant movement. That time everyone who looked at politicians would understand that they were all scared, all the political spectrum.*
>
> *Evaggelia: They [Indignant movement] were persistent and had duration.*
>
> *Despoina: Yes, it [the movement] changed the political landscape.* *(Greece, 41-60LE)*

Focus group participants in Greece argued that the Indignant movement instituted social change from below that was later reflected in the party arena with the rise of the radical left party SYRIZA. Likewise, in Germany the mobilization of the PEGIDA movement coincided with the rise in support for the radical right party AfD. Yet, respondents in both countries expressed doubts about the efficacy of collective action in post-democratic times. They referred to the high costs associated with the strategy, especially police violence and citizen surveillance (see Table 4.11). Greek and German scores on demonstration costs were very close, with more police repression (3.7 vs. 3.2) and problems at work (3.2 vs. 2.8) reported in Greece.

Table 4.11. Costs for participating in demonstrations in Greece and Germany

Demonstration Costs (1=not at all, 5=very much)	**Greece**	**Germany**	***T-test Sig***
Problems at work	3,2 (1,3)	2,8 (1,1)	*t(2228) = -8.35, p<.001*
Family disapproval	2,5 (1,2)	2,6 (1,1)	*t(2228) = 1.68, p=.09 (ns)*
Police violence	3,7 (1,2)	3,2 (1,2)	*t(2228) = -11.10, p<.001*
Surveillance	3,3 (1,3)	3,3 (1,2)	*t(2228) = -1.52, p=.13 (ns)*
	(N=1120)	(N=1110)	

4.2.4. Civic engagement

Self-reported participation in voluntary associations – passive through donations and active engagement – was moderate in both countries. Greek respondents appear more active than their German counterparts in almost all organizations presented in Table 4.11, apart from religious organizations, trade unions and sports clubs. These differences are indicative of the extensive mobilization of solidarity networks in the financial and refugee crises in Greece, and the refugee crisis in Germany.

Table 4.12. Participation in political and civic associations in Greece and Germany

Organizational embeddedness (1=no member, 2=passive, 3=active)	**Greece (passive – active)**	**Germany (passive – active)**	***Chi square test Sig***
Trade union/professional org	16% - 6%	13% - 6%	X^2 *(2,2230)=4.25, p=.12(ns)*
Political party	10% - 3%	7% - 3%	X^2 *(2,2230)=6.60, p=.03*
Student association	8% - 3%	5% - 3%	X^2 *(2,2230)=7.90, p=.02*
Church/religious org	8% - 4%	17% - 7%	X^2 *(2,2230)=71.1, p<.001*
Sports club/leisure org	13% - 12%	13% - 18%	X^2 *(2,2230)=21.6, p<.001*
Environmental/animal rights org	19% - 10%	14% - 4%	X^2 *(2,2230)=55.60, p<.001*
Neighbourhood association	13% - 5%	7% - 4%	X^2 *(2,2230)=28.20, p<.001*
Charity/human rights org	19% - 10%	14% - 3%	X^2 *(2,2230)=71.0, p<.001*
Nationalistic/patriotic org	7% - 2%	4% - 2%	X^2 *(2,2230)=15.3, p<.001*

	(N=1120)	(N=1110)

Greek respondents reported higher participation (active + passive) in charity/human rights' organizations (29% in Greece, 17% in Germany), environmental/animal rights' organizations (29% vs. 18%), and neighbourhood associations (18% vs. 11% respectively). As discussed in the focus groups, alternative resilience networks emerged out of necessity to support increasing numbers of crisis-hit citizens, the poor and the homeless. With the refugee crisis, these networks extended their services to aid the needs of asylum seekers.

> *Evaggelia: I want to stress that in Greece nowadays there are many groups [that help] and they are not only charities. They are voluntary associations that appear to do something specific but behind the scenes they do much more. [I know] because I participate in many of these. We also collect clothing and food for several communities.* *(Greece, 26-40HE)*

German respondents appeared more active in religious organizations (24%) than Greek respondents (12%). This is not surprising since neighbourhood activities and charities are often organized by religious associations (e.g., Caritas). Other organizations respondents supported were charities/human rights (17%) and environmental/animal rights organizations (18%), indicative of the mobilization of environmental groups and "welcoming initiatives" for refugees. Focus group participants provided numerous examples of solidarity initiatives at the local level welcoming refugees and assisting with basic necessities and German bureaucracy, as the state appeared increasingly disorganized in accommodating their needs.

> *Alexander: My dog trainer is totally committed [to the refugee issue]. The first days when the refugees came, she said: It cannot be that people have to stay out there, this is ridiculous. So, she went there, served tea and gave them blankets. She's engaged personally and feels good about it. The only thing she sacrifices is time and maybe some money for fuel or something.* *(Germany, 41-60HE)*

Examining the survey data, citizen engagement in voluntary associations seems modest. As will be shown in the focus group analysis, however, the emergence of solidarity networks was evaluated as rather significant in both countries and inspired citizens to get involved in politics.

4.2.5. Democratic alternatives: Populism and political decision making

In a period where politicians are perceived as being distant from ordinary citizens, yet very close to business interests, and liberal democracy appears to be in crisis, it is relevant to examine whether citizens explore alternative ways of doing politics. The focus group and survey data

indicated a certain preoccupation with further citizen inclusion in the political process in both countries. Nonetheless, politicians and representative democracy did not emerge completely delegitimized. Citizen inclusion in political decision-making was assigned a complementary role to that of politicians and experts, and had a corrective effect on the post-democratic crisis of representation.

Table 4.13. Populist attitudes in Greece and Germany

Populism	**Greece**	**Germany**	***T-test Sig***
(1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
Politicians talk too much and do very little	4,3 (0,8)	3,9 (0,9)	*t(2228) = -11.32, <.001*
Politicians should follow the will of the people	4,1 (0,8)	4,0 (0,8)	*t(2228) = -1.32, p=.09(ns)*
The people should make the decisions	3,6 (1,0)	3,6 (1,1)	*t(2228) = -1.12, p=.13(ns)*
Ordinary people can't be trusted	2,6 (1,0)	2,9 (1,0)	*t(2228) = 5.62, p=.04*
	(N=1120)	(N=1110)	

Starting with populist attitudes, the survey data do not indicate significant differences between the two publics, apart from one item referring to irresponsible governance, which was arguably higher in Greece (see Table 4.13). As a first step, respondents in both countries agree that politicians should find ways to follow the will of the people (4.1). They concede that politicians should take into consideration citizens' views when taking important political decisions. Thus, Greek and German respondents seem to address the crisis of democratic representation in multilevel governance rather than express unconditional trust in the "pure will of the people" (3.6 in both countries). This finding is supported by the focus groups, where discussants in both countries expressed doubts about their compatriots' accuracy of political knowledge and unbiased judgement to make *binding* political decisions. However, they welcomed further citizen inclusion in politics in an attempt to tackle the crisis of responsiveness by engaging in advisory referenda and public informative meetings on important issues.

> *Anna: Citizens getting more involved in the decision-making process I think it's the best thing that can happen, because I've seen something similar in Switzerland. For every important political decision in the country, they ask the citizens. I think that would help a lot.*
>
> *Nikos: Especially if the media were organized in such a way so that knowledgeable and not paid people were able to provide information regarding the alternatives we'll be voting on. (Greece, 26-40HE)*

> *Beatrix: Politics would not overwhelm people if politicians offered an opportunity to actively engage citizens, and not only with a cross on the ballot. Switzerland is now voting for Universal Basic Income at the end of the year… First and foremost, you need to make sure that it's not too time-consuming and citizens won't vote because they have to sacrifice their Sunday or holiday after a long work-week. So, we could also vote online, we're so networked and have such an infrastructure that could make everything easier.*
>
> *(Germany, Activists)*

This finding is in line with attitudes towards political decision-making (see Table 4.14). When asked who should make important political decisions, participants agreed with citizens participating in referenda (7.4 in Greece vs. 6.5 in Germany) and public meetings (6.7 vs. 6.2 respectively). Experts' providing "informed opinions" (6.8 in Greece vs. 6.2 in Germany), in contrast to "paid opinions" as proposed in the focus groups, was evaluated positively. Politicians came third (5.9 in Greece vs. 5.8 in Germany), while successful businessmen were not preferred in this domain, with ratings below the mid-point of the scale (4.1 in Greece vs. 3.2 in Germany).

Table 4.14. Political decision-making in Greece and Germany

Political decision-making	**Greece**	**Germany**	***T-test Sig***
(0=worst way, 10=best way)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
Citizens with referenda	7,4 (2,4)	6,5 (2,4)	*t(2228) = -9.88, p<.001*
Experts	6,8 (2,5)	6,2 (2,3)	*t(2228) = -7.22, p<.001*
Citizens with public meetings	6,6 (2,6)	6,2 (2,2)	*t(2228) = -4.15, p<.001*
Citizens	6,5 (2,5)	6,1 (2,4)	*t(2228) = -5.15, p<.001*
Politicians	5,9 (2,6)	5,8 (2,3)	*t(2228) = -1.51, p=.13(ns)*
Successful businessmen	4,1 (2,9)	3,2 (2,7)	*t(2228) = -8.37, p<.001*
	(N=1120)	(N=1110)	

Scores ranged between five and six on a 11-point scale, indicating ambivalence about who can make the right decisions in times of crisis. The relatively high score for Greek citizens participating in referenda (7.4) reflects disappointment with the disregarded outcome of the EU/austerity referendum as suggested in the focus groups. Overall, higher scores for citizen inclusion in decision-making in Greece (6.5 vs. 6.1) may be resonating with the "city-states" direct democratic tradition where popular sovereignty lies in the centre of governance as the term "demos+cracy" implies. German federalism provides relative political autonomy to the states (Länder) in line with the "city-states" democratic tradition, while taking into consideration the

issue of scale at different levels of the polity as the states are subjected to the powers of a centralized federal authority (Held, 2006).

Moreover, respondents were rather supportive of further engagement in the political process, highlighting the growing gap between citizens and politicians. 87% of the Greeks and the Germans in the sample expressed willingness to participate regularly or occasionally in referenda about all or most important political decisions (see Table 4.15).

Table 4.15. Frequency of referenda

Referenda (how often?)	**Greece**	**Germany**
Regularly on all important decisions	37%	38%
Occasionally on most important decisions	50%	48%
X^2 (1,2230)=2.07, p=.56(ns)	(N=1120)	(N=1110)

As stated in the focus groups, participants in both countries appeared cautious of the dangers of binding referenda for minority rights and unbiased, inclusive, and informed political decisions. They did not give "the people" blank checks.

> *Vasilis: Citizens should participate more in politics and not only with voting or referenda, because the majority is not always right. If there was a referendum for example, on migrant rights or women and gay rights, I'd be very much afraid of the outcome in our perfect little society [Irony]. (Greece, Activists)*

> *Walter: So, I think, in Berlin it could work. [Referenda such as] Tempelhof is a good example, Waterworks is a good example, but now to vote on the refugees or the euro or the EU, I don't think it could work, especially with the refugees, it's certainly a vote that could go wrong, in my opinion. (Germany, Activists)*

Once again, yet surprisingly, Greek and German participants seem to agree on the political crisis affecting their countries and the proposed alternatives for strengthening democracy as will be further explored in Chapters 5 and 6.

4.4. Discussion

The chapter presented the salient issues triggering crisis perceptions in Greece and Germany, citizens' self-reported political strategies in the movement and party arena, and attitudes towards alternatives to the crisis of representation. These general patterns, representative of the Greek and German population, provide the basis for further analysis of citizen discourse about these processes, adding validity, depth and complexity to survey research. The survey analysis showed

that the most important issues in Greece were austerity-related such as poverty, unemployment and taxation. In Germany they referred to the refugee crisis, notably immigration, terrorism and social security. Evaluations of economic situation in the last and next 12 months and income satisfaction were extremely low in Greece and stable in Germany. Immigration in both countries was perceived as having negative consequences for the economy, cultural life and life quality, yet more so in Greece possibly due to the severity of the crises.

The post-democratic crisis of representation marked its presence in Greek and German politics, and more severely, as expected, in Greece. Trust in political institutions was low in Germany and poor in Greece, below the midpoint of the evaluative scale in both countries, especially for key actors such as the government and parliament, politicians and political parties. Satisfaction with democracy was remarkably low in Greece and just on the midpoint of the scale in Germany, a widely considered advanced democracy. Specific democratic evaluations were very negative in Greece and quite negative in Germany; not only for social and participatory democratic aspects, but for the minimum of liberal democratic requirements like competitive elections, parties' representative function of diverse interests in society, equality before the law and justice. European institutions were also criticized for exacerbating existing democratic deficits. Participants' trust in the European parliament was below the midpoint of the scale in both countries.

Regarding political strategies, Greek respondents reported higher levels of political engagement in the movement and party arenas compared to German respondents, especially for voting in national and European elections, participating in the EU/austerity referendum, demonstrating, striking and boycotting. German participants reported moderate levels of engagement, particularly for voting in national and European elections, petitioning and boycotting. Vote intentions in our sample were generally in line with the 2017 German and 2019 Greek elections. Participants in both countries punished mainstream labour and conservative parties and rewarded challengers on the left and right of the political spectrum. In Germany where immigration was the crucial issue, voters favored mainly anti-immigrant challengers. In Greece with austerity being the main issue, voters rewarded predominantly anti-austerity challengers. Overall, vote intentions and actual election results indicate fragmentation of former dominant coalitions, with new and transformed political parties gaining ground.

Participation in demonstrations was evaluated as a relatively common yet costly strategy, with police violence and surveillance of protesters suggested as rather negative consequences in both cases. Engagement in civic associations was modest. Membership in human rights and environmental groups, trade unions, neighbourhood and religious associations were common examples. Regarding alternatives to the post-democratic crisis of representation, participants argued for correctives to representative liberal democracy in both countries. Further citizen inclusion in politics was proposed to have a complementary role to politicians and experts. Respondents suggested that politicians should take into account citizens' views when deciding on important issues via advisory referenda, public deliberative meetings and opinion polls, and make use of experts and independent media to inform the public about alternative political positions.

In conclusion, the significance of the focus groups becomes apparent when attempting to interpret the survey results and what the numerical differences may indicate in the two cases. Firstly, had I not conducted the focus group analysis, I would have missed the finding that the crises are perceived as multiple, multilevel and overlapping. The crises were triggered by different issues in the two countries, but they are comparable with respect to the underlying crisis of democratic representation, as I will show in Chapter 5. This is an advantage of the inductive analytical strategy I introduced in Chapters 2 and 3. Secondly, due to the unexpectedly low scores in political trust and evaluations of democratic quality, I may have concluded that people are ready to take back political power or that politicians are completely delegitimized, whereas this is not the case (even in Greece), as I will show in Chapter 6. Should the post-democratic crisis of representation continue, citizens may move to the front after experimenting with direct and participatory democracy (Indignant movement, Occupy) and alternative solidarity networks (refugees are welcome, solidarity economy). However, this consists a future empirical question.

Thirdly, I would have been unable to assess the extent of legitimacy crisis and what a one or two-point difference in trust in institutions and democratic satisfaction may signify for politics in the two countries. Germany's scores were also low, but the country was entering a political crisis in 2015, with punishment of mainstream parties suggested as a first step. In Greece several critical elections have taken place since 2010. Disappointment was directed to both mainstream and challenger parties for mismanaging the crises and being unable to follow citizens' mandate, resulting in a generalized crisis of legitimacy. Finally, I would have been unable to examine

novel forms of political engagement such as grassroots solidarity networks and eventful demonstrations in the two cases that cannot be captured by the generality of survey items.

On the other hand, the POLPART survey is a useful tool for assessing the commonality and applicability of the focus group findings. There can be many interesting interactions in the sessions and some topics may trigger more heated debate than others – is this due to the timing of the focus groups, the participants comprising them or their interaction? Due to the nature of focus group data, only a limited number of sessions can be conducted and analysed (Morgan, 1996). A careful, theoretically informed selection of participants and themes to be discussed, and non-directive moderation leaving space to group discussion, can provide very rich data (Duchesne et al., 2013); not only about participants' crisis perceptions and selection of political strategies, but more importantly, about the meaning-making mechanisms behind these processes. In this sense, focus group and survey data are complementary, and triangulation of findings is preferred to one source of information, since multiple sources increase the quality of inference and rigour of interpretation (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). That said, the next chapter shifts the focus of analysis to citizen discourse about the crises they perceive in Greece and Germany.

Chapter 5. Talking crises in Greece and Germany: Social construction, discursive performance and subject positioning. Evidence from the POLPART focus groups.

The chapter examines the ways in which Greek and German focus group participants construct the crises in their societies (social construction), the performative function of these constructions (discursive performance) and the relationship between the two publics (subject positioning). It presents the inductive grounded theory analysis of 18 focus groups conducted in Athens and Berlin in Fall 2015. Just before the focus groups, citizens in both countries were denied their collective voice. In Greece, a left-wing government was elected on an anti-austerity mandate, and a referendum took place in July with 61.3% voting against austerity. In Germany a massive demonstration was held against the TTIP – 250.000 marched in Berlin – and the lack of transparency in the EU negotiations of the trade agreement. The refugee crisis was also at its peak with pro and anti-refugee actions taking place in both countries. The topics for discussion addressed the most important issues in society and what citizens can do about those issues, without referring to the crises or Greek-German relations explicitly. Notably, the crises featured prominently from the beginning in participants' discourse, while the Greeks and the Germans were present in each and every of these crises.

Sociological literature suggests a state of multiple crises taking place since the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008 (Bauman & Bordoni, 2014; Castells, 2017). Yet, citizen discourse on these problem-areas is a hiatus in the field. Instead of defining the crises a priori, I analyse political talk to examine how citizens construct and define them in their own terms. Political talk is a specific type of social interaction where two or more people engage in exchanges of meaning with reference to politics (Schmitt-Beck & Lup, 2013). During the session participants engage in a debate about the meaning of the social world, which is not objectively 'out there', but is collectively constructed and reconstructed through and during the discussion. The analysis of political talk offers an opportunity to observe processes of *collective sense-making* and provides a glimpse of the public debate on the issue (Duchesne et al., 2013; Stanley, 2014). The aim of analysis is to present the diverse lines of argumentation and illustrate the main interpretative repertoires – the culturally familiar ways of speaking used to characterize and evaluate social phenomena – that emerge across focus groups when participants discursively construct crises in the two cases (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

The chapter addresses the following questions: Firstly, with respect to social construction, Graf & Jarausch (2017) point out that crises dramatize a *perceived threat* to an institutionalized pattern of action. *Which threat(s) do participants refer to and around which issues do they emerge? Are they perceived at the local, national, European or international level? Are they similar or different?* Secondly, regarding discursive performance, *what do participants accomplish with their discursive constructions of crises?* Since crisis constructions are essentially *narrations of failure* (Hay, 1996), *who do participants hold responsible for these problems? Which explanatory arguments do they present as self-evident and which ones do they silence as irrelevant, and why?* Thirdly, with respect to subject positioning, as crisis constructions are intimately related to perceptions of history, political culture and *shared collective identities* (Stråth & Wodak, 2009), *how do participants in the two countries position one another – as allies or opponents in Europe? What type of stereotypes are emerging? What kind of Europe is constructed?* The chapter consists of three parts introducing the comparative analysis of social construction, discursive performance and subject positioning, followed by a general discussion of the findings in the two cases.

5.0. Social construction of the Greek and German crises: Economy, refugees and politics

It is surprising that although the focus groups were conducted in the same period (October–December 2015), participants in the two countries portrayed the crises in very different ways. While in Greece "the crisis" was discussed as a serious economic crash that triggered a political crisis, in Germany it was portrayed as an intimidating refugee crisis that also generated a major political crisis. The post-democratic crisis of representation underlying the financial and refugee crises was narrated in very similar ways and appeared focal in participants' discourse. To go one step further, it is to the extent that politicians were seen as unable to tackle economic and socio-political threats over a critical period of time, and represent citizens' interests in political decision making that transformed these threats into crises.

Furthermore, even though participants started the discussion with country specifics of the crises, they quickly introduced a European and international dimension. The financial crisis in Greece may be the outcome of economic mismanagement, yet it was seen as part of the American and European capitalist crash. The refugee crisis may have affected Germany predominantly due to its powerful position in Europe, nonetheless it was perceived as part of conflicts in the Middle

East and climate change. The post-democratic crisis of representation was related to political corruption and lobbying; yet also to globalization and the proliferation of international governance institutions such as the EU and NATO.

Thus, participants introduce a multilevel structure when discussing the crises, highlighting the national and European dimension depending on the issue under scrutiny. The financial crisis in Greece was described as taking place primarily at the national level, while in Germany it was perceived as the problem of countries in the European periphery. Participants in Germany discussed the refugee crisis as affecting them disproportionally at the national level, whereas in Greece they underlined the European dimension of the issue. The post-democratic crisis of representation was portrayed as taking place simultaneously at the national and European level, and narrated vey equivalently by both the Greeks and the Germans.

I will now proceed with evidence from the focus groups. Participants discussed several issues triggering concerns among the citizenry, but these can be categorized more broadly into the financial, refugee and political crises. Each section begins with the case that was most affected by the crisis under discussion.

5.1. The financial crisis

5.1.1. Social construction: Mode of survival in Greece, hamster wheel in Germany

The financial crisis was predominantly problematized in Greece as it placed large segments of the population at risk of poverty and precarity. During the 2010-2015 bailout period, the country's GDP dropped 25%. Wages and pensions were halved in most cases, while commodity prices remained high; poverty and unemployment escalated, the latter reaching 50% among the youth; layoffs in the public sector and closure of small business were common; welfare benefits were slashed; public healthcare and education was dismantled (Karyotis & Gerodimos, 2015). The intensity and severity of the crisis is portrayed by the themes discussed: pauperization and precarity; lack of social security; unemployment, work exploitation and flexibility; depression, homelessness, drug abuse and suicides; emigration and brain drain. Contrary, participants in Germany acknowledged the resilient state of the economy at home, especially in comparison to southern European countries. Participants expressed concerns about life quality due to the

recession, but did not construct a financial crisis per se. When discussing the financial crisis, they would refer to the "Greek crisis", affecting them indirectly due to the bailout agreements.

In 2015 with Greece still in recession, the crisis was defined as a process of continuous pauperization for the majority of the population, filling participants with uncertainty, insecurity and fear for further reductions in life quality. Participants introduced a particular interpretative repertoire, "mode of survival", to refer to the process of gradually becoming poorer every time the Greek government signs a MoU with the Troika of lenders [EC, ECB, IMF].

> *Mihalis: What I'm saying is that when you earned 1500 euros and they cut it down to 1000 or 1200 euros, you went out to protest. Now that from 1500 euros you end up getting 500 euros and you're in danger to go to 400 euros you don't protest, because you're genuinely afraid that you'll lose even the 400 and you'll really have nothing. What I'm saying is that when you were at 1500 euros it wasn't a matter of sustenance, but of life quality – well now, you don't have life quality anymore. There's a big majority that is either unemployed or under-employed or whatever, and from receiving 1000+ euros pensions, now they've reached 700euros etc. These people who have lost so much, normally now that they're in danger of losing even more (with the 3rd MoU), rationally speaking, if they were protesting in the first phase (1st MoU), now in the third phase (3rd MoU), people should go crazy, crazy!*
>
> *Giorgos: Why aren't people going crazy?*
>
> *Mihalis: They aren't because simply, this is what I'm saying, people have become passive. To go out in the streets and do what? Lose even the few things I have? […] When one doesn't have food to eat, really, I don't think they care, they get into survival mode. And it's not individualism, it's not indifference, it's like if I don't do what I'm doing now, which is perceived as individualism and indifference, I have nothing to eat. Hence, there's an issue, why should I change [something], since till something changes, I'll be dead, if I have nothing to eat.* *(Greece, 18-25HE)*

In this mode of survival, Greek participants are mainly preoccupied with their individual sustenance instead of overthrowing the regime, because they lack basic resources such as food, money or accommodation. With the first austerity package citizens in Greece had to learn to live with less. Yet, as they suggest, there is a threshold below which people have no life quality anymore. Instead, they stress constantly to make ends meet, preoccupied with survival and basic material needs. Participants concede that this threshold has been surpassed. In this excerpt participants intuitively discuss the relationship between grievances and political mobilization. A certain level of grievances is necessary for people to get out of their comfort zone. Yet too many grievances may lead citizens to disengagement due to fear for their survival. Thus, grievances are necessary for mobilization, but a certain level of resources is required.

This mode of survival emerged also behaviourally. Participants in five out of the nine discussions in Greece (26-40HE, 26-40LE, 41-60HE, 41-60LE, 61+LE) expressed great

discomfort at being unemployed already when introducing themselves and in one case asked explicitly for reassurance to receive the participation fee. As a result of austerity policies and budget cuts, participants lack basic welfare provision in education, healthcare, housing, and employment. In the following excerpt participants describe a state of generalized and multiple crises taking place in Greek society and its psychological effects on the population.

> *Stamatis: Ok apart from the financial problem, there's sadness, depression I'd call it.*
>
> *Athanasia: Yes, pessimism*
>
> *Aggeliki: There's a term for this, national depression. I remember watching a documentary about Argentina after 2001. They conducted a survey to examine how much cases of depression and heart attacks increased during the crisis and they had gone up by 70%.*
>
> *Vivi: Yes, this is what we see with the rise in drug addiction in our country. I don't know the statistics exactly, but based on what I see out in the streets, I see young kids, 25 years or younger, totally wasted. So yes, I believe that there has definitely been an increase in drug addiction.*
>
> *Aggeliki: Yesterday I was reading about the EU prevention strategy for depression and suicides, and it said that every nine minutes a European citizen commits suicide, I found that socking.*
>
> *Vivi: Also, in the healthcare sector, there's serious lack of medicine and doctors in the hospitals. The situation is very, very serious. And doctors now get a reduced salary… there will definitely be a decrease in quality eventually, plus they're missing medical supplies.*
>
> *Athanasia: Education is also underfunded.*
>
> *Anna: Indeed, education is terribly underfunded.*
>
> *Makis: Basically, we start with the economy, and we discuss each public sector, because they all depend on the economy.*
>
> *Vivi: It's also a crisis of values. The next generation will be super individualistic and cynical due to the crisis. People will care only for themselves and their survival.*
>
> *Stamatis: Yes, I see the individualism and dehumanization that you mention, but I think there's also a parallel movement, that of solidarity, charity, however you may call it. It's an attempt, since we cannot rely on politicians anymore, we'll do some small things to help each other. (Greece, 26-40HE)*

Participants in Greece associate the mode of survival they experience with lack of social welfare, unemployment, sadness, pessimism, (national) depression, homelessness, drug abuse and suicides. Aggeliki (26-40HE) brings the example of the financial crisis in Argentina to substantiate their argumentation and contextualize the effects of the crisis in Greece. Participants suggest a state of multiple crises taking place. It is an economic crisis, but also a political crisis; a crisis of values, as well as a crisis of Europe. Although participants are positioned both on the left and right of the political spectrum, they reach consensus with their narrations of crisis severity. The financial crisis triggered individualism and survivalism, as indicated in the previous excerpt.

Yet, it also brought citizens together in solidarity, because they cannot rely on politicians and the state anymore to provide a basic level of social security.

References to sadness, depression, suicides and violence increasing with the financial crisis were unique to the Greek case (Arapoglou & Gounis, 2015). One participant (41-60HE) even shared his experience with suicidal thoughts, when, fired at age 55, he could not find a job at this age and provide for his family. Unemployment does not only affect young people, but also older groups due to layoffs in the public sector and closure of businesses. Unemployment, austerity and lack of social security are perceived as systemic violence, that is either expressed inwards as depression, or outwards as violence against others. Participants referred also to the "new homeless". People who used to have a "normal life" – a job, a home and a family – but made the "mistake" of getting a loan, starting a family or business just before the crisis hit.

> *Liza: These homeless were once very respectable people, they had jobs and businesses. I've seen people that used to own shops and found themselves homeless, very respectable people. So, we shouldn't talk about them like they were homeless, because you don't know who these people were… they weren't born homeless the crisis made them homeless, neither were they lazy.*
>
> *Kyriakos: Yes, like I don't know these people? They worked somewhere, the business closed down, the end. Within 24 hours all bad can happen.*
>
> *Kiki: And there are suicides in my circle.*
>
> *Liza: There are more than 10.000 suicides.* *(Greece, 61+ LE)*

Participants present stories of how "respectable people" can end up being homeless. Stories that they did not only hear in the media but also "know from their circle of friends and family" (Liza, 61+LE). In this dire situation, young people feel that they have no future, without prospects of finishing their studies, finding a meaningful job, or starting a family. Even parenting discussants suggested that it is better for their children to emigrate because "they cannot live in their own country" (Kiki, 61+LE).

On the other hand, discussing the financial crisis participants in Germany differentiated between the resilient state of the economy at home and the Greek crisis [Griechenlandkrise]. Participants reached consensus that the level of prosperity in the country was satisfactory, especially in comparison to southern European countries. With regards to the "Greek crisis", discussants described time and again a fundamental sense of injustice – that of having played by the rules, but paid repeatedly for other people's irresponsibility. Although critical repertoires

highlighted the role of the banking sector, participants in Germany overall described the "Greek crisis" as a "homemade" problem of corruption, tax evasion, lack of productivity, laid-back culture and early retirement (see subject positioning in the FC).

Regarding the state of the economy in Germany, participants acknowledged the country's powerful position. Nonetheless, in times of crisis, they raised concerns with keeping up their good performance.

> *Konstantin: I think that a little bit us Germans, I'll say now, we are doing well, insofar we have something to eat, we have something to drink, we drive a car, we have a mobile phone, why should I change anything? Many people think so, they don't have serious problems...*
>
> *Christine: Are we really doing that well?*
>
> *Jennifer: We have a basic level of social security.*
>
> *Christine: Well, you just have to look around Köpernick, there are now ten people who live under the station.*
>
> *Konstantin: Sure ok, but as I said before in the introduction, I really like to travel, and I like to travel to southern European countries. When I see the situation over there, then [I think that] we're doing well. They're extremely poor.* *(Germany, 41-60LE)*

Participants introduce a notion of relative deprivation. Germany is doing well, but not great. They were concerned with budget cuts in social services (Hartz IV reforms), increase in poverty and homelessness, employment flexibility and precarity, difficulty in family formation and child rearing, inflation, rising prices in the housing market and gentrification, imbalance between working hours, wages and citizens' purchasing power after the introduction of the euro (26-40LE). Compared to southern Europeans, participants in Germany suggested they were relatively well off, but in comparison to past times or Scandinavia's "social system", they felt they lagged behind.

> *Reinhardt: We're doing well in Europe, not only in the EU, we are by far the best, there's not so much distance between old and recent times.*
>
> *Hugo: The Swedes are doing best. The best social system.*
>
> *Doris: They still have that.*
>
> *Ursula: But inflation, economic performance, also what you work for and what you earn. Berlin is extremely affected by this…*
>
> *Hugo: People work stupid hours and they can no longer afford their apartment. With two incomes, if you have kids, you are poor.*

Ursula: And that, I find it actually frightening [the fact] that you can no longer afford the luxury of having children. So, with two children you're poor, that's frightening. Thus, you probably need immigration, because the Germans cannot afford having kids anymore, because they don't earn enough, yes.

Reinhardt: With 1.100 or 1.300 (euros). *(Germany, 61+HE)*

Concerns with raising a family and paying the bills were common themes in Germany. Wages appear triple those in Greece (450 euros). German participants may not experience the "mode of survival" Greek participants referred to, but they introduced their own interpretative repertoire, "the hamster wheel" [Hamsterrad], to describe a stressful individualistic lifestyle that leaves them with no time to think out of their bubble and engage in public affairs. Working non-stop, taking care of the family, paying the bills, too many worries and too little time. In the words of Doris (26-40LE): "*I think a lot of people are busy with their everyday lives, they have children, they have to take care of their home. Some people may not have the convenience, and maybe they don't have the time either, because they're in their hamster wheel, doing other things".* Yet, participants overall reached consensus that the level of prosperity in Germany was satisfactory.

Alexander: I believe that it simply takes a certain amount of suffering to get out of your comfort zone and become active, and many people don't have that pain, they're fine, they have a secure job. For instance, if I don't kill anyone, I'll be able to do my job until retirement, yes, I earn well, I don't have to get involved, I can really do without. But I also find it annoying when people say I don't even want to talk about it, I'm not interested, I don't watch the news, I don't read the newspaper, I don't give a shit about anything. I always think, where do you live, in such a vacuum? So, you live in society and it's run by politics, it concerns you after all. Nope, they just say nope, it doesn't concern me…

Konrad: Yes, I think they're trapped in their daily lives, in their personal problems. The ones I see now they say I don't understand net neutrality and refugees are shit because they take away our jobs. Then comments emerge like, but have you seen anyone like that in your life? Have you been to a refugee home before? No. They have children, I don't know, or they're single parenting and that's their focus in life, yes. How do I raise my kids, how do I avoid getting depressed, there's simply no time and intellect [to think about politics]. *(Germany, 41-60HE)*

The absence of "a certain amount of suffering", the hamster wheel of everyday life, and widespread political disenchantment is seemingly triggering individualism and passivity instead of communitarian sentiments and engagement. Participants perceive that the problems of others "don't concern them directly" (Suzanne, 26-40HE). Instead, they are preoccupied with own worries. Contrary to the Greek case (too many grievances), participants in Germany underline that a certain amount of suffering is needed for people to engage in political action. Too many resources may lead to disengagement.

All in all, with regard to the economy it is participants in Greece that construct a state of generalized crisis at the national level. The intensity and severity of the financial crisis is exemplified by the use of notions relating to life and death. Greek politicians are seen as imposing poverty on citizens instead of representing their interests. Participants in Germany portray a resilient economy, but also express concerns over budget cuts, employment conditions and life quality. The financial crisis is perceived mainly as a matter of Greece and other southern European countries that "behaved irresponsibly".

5.1.2. Discursive performance: Global capitalist crash in Greece, Greek particularity in Germany

Participants in Greece would avoid the "Greek particularity" argument that the economy was traditionally in bad shape. They instead underlined the claim that the financial crisis was triggered by the American and European capitalist crash in 2008 and 2010 respectively. They scrutinized the choice of austerity as crisis management strategy, while silencing the "fairness and equality" argument with respect to the Eurozone criteria and the compliance of other countries to the rules. Left wing participants portrayed austerity as a neoliberal scheme and punishment mechanism so that citizens, not only in the country but the rest of Europe, know that "There Is No Alternative" (TINA doctrine). Right-wing participants would suggest that there is an organized plan behind austerity to subordinate small nations to the "new world order" drafted by powerful nations. Hence, left-wing and right-wing participants in Greece portrayed austerity as a subordination strategy staged by powerful players, the markets and capitalists in the first case, dominating nations and cultures in the second.

> *Olga: It was meant to happen this way. It was probably a political strategy, so that the Greek people seem to have spoken [with the EU referendum] and then punished because we cannot do otherwise. There's no debt in my view, and in many others'.*
>
> *M: Why can't we do otherwise?*
>
> *Olga: Because in papers we're in debt, but basically, we're the guinea pigs 6 years now, who have to be punished paradigmatically so that all peoples in Europe who want to do otherwise learn to act accordingly, this is what I believe.*
>
> *Eleni: Yes, there are specific interests in the region.*
>
> *Evaggelia: I never believed in this referendum. I knew from the beginning what was bound to happen. They have vested interests [in keeping the situation as it is]. He [PM Tsipras} pretended to give people a voice, some people believed they were allowed to express themselves, but some things were already predetermined.*

Olga: Yes, there's definitely a plan.

Giannis: Who's plan is it?

Eleni: It's the invisible world that pulls the strings. *(Greece, 41-60 LE)*

Not all participants in Greece were persuaded by SYRIZA's proposed referendum on austerity. Some saw it as blame avoidance strategy. However, among supporters and non-supporters of SYRIZA, the conclusion was the same: foreign powers control the political environment in the country. Participants often brought the example of Iceland to substantiate their claims that there is an alternative way of dealing with the crisis.

Valantis: I can present an example of a country that rejected that political and economic propaganda [of austerity] and at the time being minimum wage is 1200 euros – minimum wage per month – but in Icelandic Corona. I talk about Iceland. The population is 300.000 and they decided for themselves, even without foreign exchange reserves to cover their expenditures. *(Greece, 26-40 LE)*

Takis: Like in Iceland, where citizens revised their constitution collectively after the crisis, and sent the bankers to jail first thing. *(Greece, 41-60 HE)*

As regards blame attributions, Greek politicians were widely seen as responsible for the financial collapse, since they have access to expert information on macro-economic performance. As Lena (activists) suggested, echoing many participants, "it's impossible for ordinary citizens to know the specifics of the country's GDP to debt ratio". The EU and the Troika were also blamed for putting the burden on people's shoulders, while hiding the root causes of the financial crisis, which in their view lay with the European and world economy.

Participants in Germany referred to economic threats generated by budget cuts in social security, reduction in life quality, and economic pessimism, but did not construct a financial crisis per se. The financial crisis was related to the Greeks and other Europeans who did not follow the Eurozone rules. Participants would frame the financial crisis as a "Greek particularity" and blame, implicitly or explicitly, the Greeks for their profligate lifestyle. In this repertoire, the Greeks received funding multiple times for a problem that was seen as caused by their own irresponsible behaviour (tax evasion, corruption). Participants lacked understanding of the politics in another country and believed that solidarity was provided with the MoUs. They instead introduced a notion of relative deprivation to suggest that they also have problems. They argued that the economy is doing well but not great, and this is due to their responsibility and sacrifices.

Igor: Italy doesn't have a surplus, Spain doesn't have a surplus either, they simply lived quite differently and they had a boom in construction or something, my mother lives in Spain. And it's difficult to make

> *concessions to the Greeks. Then the Spaniards will say, 'wait a minute, we need to save money, but they don't have to'? Germany is simply somehow well positioned in Europe and the difficult thing is to project this on other countries… And it's difficult, if other countries have wasted money and we balanced the budget, so to speak, in any case better than other countries, then it's difficult to tell the German people 'Yes, by the way, we need to pay for others, because they didn't keep within budget as we did'.*
>
> *Armin: I don't know what you mean, 'keep within budget'? German public debt is by now at over two trillion, yesterday I [saw] something in the news. Only in the last four years funds for education have been cut by 40 percent due to administrative bloat. Germany is not doing well, [although] it's always portrayed like it was. Eight million low-wage earners. There's much talk instead of looking at the facts.*
>
> *Igor: Sure, so let's put it like this: Germans, we are not doing badly, but of course we're also not doing well either if you consider how many billions should be invested in infrastructure, education and schools, that children have to paint [their classrooms] themselves, because there's no money available. Let me put it like this, probably there's enough money available, but it's just badly distributed. (Germany, 26-40LE)*

In this excerpt participants elaborate on the interpretative repertoire of injustice – that of playing by the rules yourself, but paying repeatedly for other people's irresponsibility. In this repertoire Germany appears as "somehow well positioned" in Europe (Igor, 26-40LE), and this is due to citizens' responsible behaviour. Greek citizens, as well as Italians and Spaniards, are portrayed as living beyond their means. The repertoire resonates with the cultural tradition of protestant work ethic and individual responsibility (e.g., the thrifty Swabian housewife) (Helms, Van Esch, & Crawford, 2019). In contrast to Greece, the topic of austerity or crises in capitalism is not problematized thoroughly in the discussions. Participants employ a mechanism of relative deprivation, "eight million low wage earners, 40% cuts in education". This way they shield themselves from accusations of selfishness and unwillingness to share their good fortune with others. In times of crisis, German citizens also suffer from budget cuts and uncertainty.

Therefore, with respect to blame attributions, German participants underlined the "Greek particularity" and "fairness and equality" argument while relativizing their dominant position in Europe. The influence of Germany on Greek politics was sometimes acknowledged, and mainly presented as economic assistance rather than economic and political subordination. Greeks were seen as responsible for their predicament, and the EU was also blamed for not identifying the underlying problems of corruption in the Greek economy.

5.1.3. Subject positioning: The Greek underdog and the German responsible European

Participants in Greece positioned themselves as the underdog in Europe, who is in this position due to unequal distribution of resources and power. They portrayed as allies predominantly citizens in the European periphery and the global South. Contrary, citizens in the European and

global North were seen as "others", especially residents of wealthy and powerful nations. Germany was perceived to be waging an "economic war" against Greece and other peripheral countries. Discussants expressed a certain inferiority complex regarding notions of Europeanness and strong wealthy economies in the Northwest. They would self-stereotype themselves as being part of the "poor Balkans" instead of the "rich Europeans", especially the French and the Germans. They argued that this inferiority/superiority positioning was reciprocal, because this is how the "rich Europeans" approached them in the Eurozone crisis, like they don't belong to "civilized Europe".

> *Kiki: Does anybody ask why we have the Euro since our statistics were fake? We are a poor country.*
>
> *Lisa: We have nothing to do with Europe…*
>
> *Kiki: … with the organization of European countries. Look at France, or Germany. There's no resemblance. We are an Eastern-Western mess...*
>
> *Lisa: … Balkans, like the foreigners call us, that we shouldn't have entered (the Eurozone), because we are Balkans.*
>
> *Kiki: Exactly. So, we entered the Eurozone, we were proud, PM Simitis [former prime minister] was proud holding the Euro in his hand… how long did it last? 12 years, 13 years not even. 10 years.*
>
> *Kosmas: Well, they treat us like Balkans now.*
>
> *Kiki: Yes, but does anyone ask why we entered the Eurozone? Because everything started back then.*
>
> *Savvas: They wanted us in the Eurozone though.*
>
> *Liza: But they didn't ask us if we wanted to join the currency union.*
>
> *Kiki: I don't care what they wanted. How was the financial situation in our country?*
>
> *Kyriakos: There should have been a referendum which never happened. We changed currency and nothing happened. Tell me in which civilized country can something like that occur? (Greece, 61+ LE)*

This inferiority complex appears to be an integral component of the Greek national identity, balancing between Western and Eastern influences – "*we are an Eastern-Western mess*". Participants could see this geographical positioning and mixed identity as a resource. However, they tend to perceive their Balkan roots as an indication of their deficit in economic, cultural and political development. Once again, the Europeans are portrayed as taking important decisions for them, without them, like with the Eurozone membership. As discussed already, the Icelanders were approached as allies and an example of political self-determination. They put corrupt bankers and politicians in jail and they collectively revised their constitution. Participants discussed also the Argentinian case as a similar environment in the South where bankers and

politicians attempted a financial coup against their people. Argentinians were perceived as courageous people that resisted the TINA doctrine, but suffered alike.

On the other hand, German participants presented themselves as responsible, hard-working Europeans, who keep a balanced budget and even assist others who have behaved "irresponsibly". They take all the burden on their soldiers and place community before individual interests. The Germans are thus good Europeans. The Greeks and other Southerners (Italians, Spaniards in the discussions) were seen as relaxed and fun-loving, yet lazy and corrupt. The topic of early retirement in Greece triggered intense and recurring debates.

> *Sascha: It's a bit like raising children. I cannot just give them money and say, "here buy something to eat", I have an educational mandate. And it's almost the same, I cannot just give money to Greece and say 'protect the borders now, but how you do it doesn't interest me as long as people don't cross your border'.*
>
> *Jennifer: Yes, we're talking about Greece again, but how can somebody address the issue of corruption in Greece, and Greece isn't alone in this. I bet the ordinary German citizen wasn't surprised to hear the news.*
>
> *Christine: Yes, but maybe us Germans appear a bit too naive here. So, I like going to Greece, I like the Greeks, and if you look at yourself, why are you there for? They have a certain cosiness, they have a completely different culture, they have a completely different temperament.*
>
> *Jennifer: They have a completely different social system.... So, if you talk about the EU, you also have to talk about the social system and you have to ask yourself, why do people there retire at 42? And I miss that.*
>
> *Sascha: Yes, but it's quite ambivalent whether they really retire at 42.*
>
> *Jennifer: I only heard that from Greeks.*
>
> *Sascha: Yes, you're right. But then you have to get straight to the point and ask: Why couldn't we overcome ourselves and say: People, yes, you're the inventors of the word "Europe", I think it's great, and you also invented democracy. Yes, it's all quite fair, but take a few more years and then you're welcome to join us (in the Eurozone). But then the first mistake was made. Neither the Greek nor the German people could do anything about it. The decision was taken on another level, and it was wrong. It's just as wrong to include countries like Romania and Bulgaria, because you know exactly what the problems there are.*
>
> *(Germany, 41-60LE)*

Participants refer to the Greeks as kids that require supervision with financial issues, while the Germans appear as mature and responsible adults. They express frustration with the Greeks retiring earlier and receiving supposedly the same pension as German citizens. The politicization of the topic of retirement in the German discussions and the contrasting factual information provided indicates media influence. This confusion around retirement age – it used to be 57 and now it is 67 – is introduced to suggest that German citizens work harder than Greek citizens. Participants' image of the latter is related to holiday images, and not to the deprivation and suffering triggered by the financial crisis. As shown in this excerpt, stereotypes, as

oversimplifications of diverse social groups and complex behaviour, contain a positive and a negative pole. Christine (41-60LE) introduces the positive characteristic of cosiness and hospitality, followed by Jennifer and Sascha underlying the negative aspects of laziness and trickiness. This negative description extends to characterize Greece's political history and current predicament. Although the former is presented as important in the past (Europe, democracy), the latter is categorized as corrupt and problematic (Balkan). The repertoire of the EU as a distant post-democratic institution will be elaborated further in the refugee and political crises.

Therefore, participants in Greece and Germany seem to agree that there are inferior and superior positionings of Europeanness in the financial crisis that trigger disunity and competition instead of alliance and solidarity. They introduce specific dividing lines between the north and the south, the west and the east, portraying a divided European environment.

5.2 The refugee crisis

5.2.1. Social construction: Foreign invasion in Germany, humanitarian crisis in Greece

If the financial crisis and austerity was mainly politicized in Greece, in Germany it was the so-called refugee crisis and particularly the question of integration and multiculturalism. The focus groups were conducted two months after Chancellor Merkel announced that the country will receive 1.5 million refugees, the largest quota in Europe, with the famous declaration, "We can do it!" [Wir schaffen das!] (Mushaben, 2017). In that speech, German citizens were portrayed as strong and resilient, having been through large migration flows in the past, and yet managing to pull through. However, participants in the focus groups were of another opinion. They repeatedly stated that this was a mistaken decision in times of crisis, which did not take into account public opinion and relative fatigue with multiculturalism (El-Tayeb, 2015). On the other hand, in Greece, the refugee crisis was portrayed as an international humanitarian crisis that presented another indication of solidarity deficit in Europe. Although it affected disproportionally a crisis-hit country at the southern border of Europe, there was general consensus that refugees target Germany and other "wealthy" northern European countries as a safe haven where they can start over their lives.

Indicative of its significance, in five out of the nine focus groups in Germany (18-25HE, 26-40LE, 41-60LE, 41-60HE, 61+LE), participants referred to the refugee crisis at the beginning

of the discussion while introducing themselves (like their Greek counterparts in the financial crisis). Participants acknowledged the life-threatening conditions refugees face in their countries of origin (war, famine, totalitarian regimes). Yet, they expressed frustration at the large numbers to be received, portraying an environment of "foreign invasion" – "they are too many" they said repeatedly. They were annoyed by the chaotic, disorganized state response in accommodating them relying heavily on the responsibility of volunteers, and the fact that citizens' compliance was taken for granted. It was the junction of the two, the large numbers of people and the lack of systematic long-term refugee policy, that was suggestive of the discursive crisis situation.

> *Jennifer: At the moment I think it's the breeding ground for everything terrible, because people are working with fear on all sides. I must honestly say that I'm a bit afraid of the near future.*
>
> *Sascha: And detailed information is missing. So, it's nice that Mrs Merkel stands up and says: We can do it. In an interview where the moderator did not dare to ask any questions or was previously briefed: Ask questions and you will never see this woman in front of you again, probably that was the message. But to stand up without offering any solutions, but simply say, we can't do this and we can't do that. And then I go abroad to talk to Mr. Erdogan, so that the refugees won't come to us anymore. Yes, but what are you doing there? And it's honestly about that, we already had foreigners [in the past], and that includes my background, my grandparents were the first generation and a lot went wrong. Now we're starting over again and we have actually the possibility to do it right this time, but there's no way.*
>
> *Jennifer: We're only looking for accommodation, we have a doghouse, but what takes place in there is insane. I don't want to spend two hours in that place. I haven't experienced something so crazy, something so stupid.*
>
> *Konstantin: And the situation in the Tempelhof is the same, it's inhumane.*
>
> *Jennifer: The situation cries out for violence; it cries out for aggression.*
>
> *Marko: And then there are eight, nine, ten people, in twenty square meters.*
>
> *Jennifer: Most traumatized people living under these circumstances.* *(Germany, 41-60LE)*

Participants in Germany underline the lack of state provision and the inhumane conditions in the camps that refugees experience in an advanced democracy. They express fear and frustration at being silenced in this important political decision that will affect future generations. The refugee crisis was discussed as activating previous experiences with immigration in the 1960s–1970s. Participants referred to the "large presence" of former Turkish "guest workers" and "Muslim" migrants in society. A common interpretative repertoire indicated that "Germans felt like foreigners in their own country", especially in a multicultural city like Berlin. Particular neighbourhoods (Kreuzberg, Neukölln) were presented as ghettos, where people spoke foreign languages and did not conform with liberal German norms. Participants would argue that their objections are based on lived experience and not just opinion. In this excerpt Sascha (41-60LE)

addresses her own positionality as second-generation migrant to suggest that integration in the country of residence is necessary so that the formation of parallel societies is avoided. Overall, German discussants argued for a welcoming but realistic and responsible approach, which would treat refugees with respect and would avoid repeating "mistakes of the past".

The common theme around which the refugee crisis was constructed in Germany was integration, which triggered economic (job market, welfare state), cultural (religion, radicalism) and political (terrorism, authoritarianism) threats to participants' well-being. Although discussants appeared sympathetic to refugees' troubled life stories, they also perceived them as culturally distinct and potentially problematic if particular criteria were not set beforehand with a viable refugee policy. Their stances ranged from empathetic solidarity and compassion; to realpolitik approaches of relative control over immigration (less people based on specific language and education criteria); differentiation between refugees and economic migrants; to fears of lawlessness rising among unintegrated "foreigners"; implicit and explicit sentiments of Islamophobia and racism. The level of politicization of "Islam" and "cultural differences" in Germany was considerably higher than in Greece, where most attention was directed to "austerity" and "economic inequalities" in society and Europe.

> *Igor: I'm annoyed at the moment with the media on the refugee issue, it's everywhere. Not in the sense that the refugees annoy me, for God's sake, it's clear that the people need help, they're always welcome and also the solidarity. It's just the way the whole thing is now being pursued by politicians. Everyone blames the other and nobody moves in the same direction, it's a very difficult topic at the moment.*
>
> *Armin: I agree with you. I cannot hear the word refugees anymore; you see how the situation failed terribly. Above all, everything was foreseeable, but now they [politicians] pretend like they didn't see it coming…*
>
> *M: Frustration and being annoyed*
>
> *Doris: Well, a lot of fear too, I have a colleague in my office who grew up in the GDR and he has the same feeling at the moment like when the East was decaying back then. He's also gay and many people come from countries where there's death penalty, and thus, everyone really has their individual fears. Everyone has different opinions because everyone has different experiences, and this is what makes it so difficult.*
>
> *Igor: Everyone has a different culture, of course, and a different opinion, and that's ok. But I think that if you go to another country, then you have to adjust your behaviour accordingly. I cannot go to Turkey and behave however I want; I have to show respect…*
>
> *Armin: Of course, I also have such fears of cultural alienation. Where I live it's desperation of humanity anyway. I only have to walk three meters in the street and it's enough for me already. Berlin is so culturally overcrowded, especially Neukölln.*
>
> *Doris: Yes, I also live in Marienhof, Tempelhof. It's too much in some areas… And yes, you can't do anything yourself, you're not even asked. Merkel says 'we can do it', the question is though: do we want it?*

> *So many people think they don't want it. It's not about whether we can make it, but whether we want this at all. Some say they want it, some say they don't, and there's simply no consensus, so you're being silenced.*
>
> *Armin: I think you're absolutely right. I personally think that it's ruining our country. We can't make it. 1.5 million, it's madness! I have nothing against foreigners, but they're too many. And we are not responsible for the Syrian civil war either, there must be an end somewhere. (Germany, 26-40LE)*

Participants in Germany expressed frustration with politicians' handling of the refugee crisis and the "government-controlled media" on the issue. The liberal refugee policy that Chancellor Merkel endorsed went against the discursive opportunity structure on the issue (Engler, Bauer-Blaschkowski, & Zohlnhöfer, 2019). The centre-right CDU/CSU traditionally promoted a more conservative approach to immigration, and even prominent party members (e.g., Horst Seehofer) contested this policy. Moreover, Merkel's address that multiculturalism has failed in 2010 was at odds with her humanitarian call in 2015. Although some were inspired, most participants engaged in an intense argumentation why overall "we cannot do it" – that is, integrate 1.5 million refugees. Fear and anxiety feature prominently in the discussions. Fears that Germany is moving backwards to its poor eastern European past (GDR). Fears that in times of crisis, fewer resources will have to split between locals and foreigners. Fears that LGTBQ+ citizens will experience sexism and discrimination. Fears that refugees come mainly from Islamic countries and will radicalize a secular society. Fears that ISIS fighters may be among them preparing terrorist attacks (see subject positioning in the RC). Participants also underlined what they perceive as "lack of European solidarity" on the issue, with countries like Germany being overburdened with people, while other Europeans (Luxemburg, Hungary, Poland, the UK in the discussions) turning a blind eye or even building fences to stop any people from coming in (see Political crisis at the European level p. 113).

Critical repertoires in Germany pointed out the life-threatening conditions refugees face in their countries of origin. These participants mainly on the left, criticized the involvement of the Bundeswehr [arms industry] in conflicts in the Middle East, suggesting disengagement from the region and the end of warfare. The real cause of the refugee crisis for them was war and climate change. Contrary, right wing participants argued that the refugee issue was the outcome of "homemade problems" in these regions, referring to dictatorship, corruption and religious radicalization. They suggested that refugee camps should be built in these regions (e.g., Lebanon) instead of allowing people to come to Europe to avoid "cultural clashes" in the host societies.

On the other hand, participants in Greece referred to the refugee crisis briefly, as contributing to the financial and political collapse in the country, which was arguably the main topic of discussion. The refugee crisis was portrayed as an international humanitarian crisis stemming from conflicts in the Middle East and Western Imperialism (e.g., War on Terror). A common interpretative repertoire referred to the European management strategy as presenting another indication of incompetence in dealing with a severe crisis in a humane manner, hinting towards their austerity/forced pauperization treatment. The EU was largely perceived as prioritizing monetary values to solidarity and humanity.

> *Athanasia: The refugee crisis is a huge issue lately.*
>
> *Aggeliki: I read that the UN has recorded the largest migration flows in years, almost 60 million people are currently on the move. It's terrible what happened with the refugee crisis, and not only, also what happened with Greece and the [financial] crisis. The EU has adopted the most irrelevant and inhumane position all these years, so did the UN. I'm very disappointed with this situation, the refugee crisis I think was the last incident that made me believe that the EU cannot move forward in this form at the moment, and the UN in general doesn't do much about anyone. (Greece, 26-40HE)*

Participants in Greece suggested that the refugee crisis affects them disproportionally due to the country's geographical location at the southern border of Europe. Yet, they acknowledged that refugees approach Greece as a passage on their way to security and stability in north-western Europe, because of the crisis-ridden environment in the country. Like their German counterparts, discussants underlined the lack of European unity and solidarity on the issue: countries shutting down their borders so that refugees cannot proceed to their destination, remaining stuck in first host countries due to the Dublin European Regulation.

> *Vivi: Yet Greece has a very specific role in the European Union, because we receive refugees. So, the situation in the country becomes even more complicated. It's not enough that the country has a weak economy and a legacy of civil war. We receive refugees and this has to do with Europe's interests. Basically, Greece has become a bit like the sewer of Europe.*
>
> *Anna: Once again Germany said it will welcome the refugees but, in the end, we got them instead.*
>
> *Vivi: For years now, I hear that refugees want to reach Germany. That was always the motto. What's really happening though – I don't want to judge the refugees now, whether they have families in Germany or they want to work there – is that they got stuck in Greece, where I cannot find a job being Greek myself, you can imagine how difficult it's for them.*
>
> *Makis: But they don't want to stay here, they only see it as passage.*
>
> *Vivi: Yes, but how easy is it for them to leave Greece?*

Makis: Not at all since other countries have closed their borders… and they don't care what happens to them or us, they are like "[since] you're there, you'll receive them now, [and] you'll find out what to do with them".

Stamatis: What many people don't know is that the Greek government signed a treaty [Dublin Regulation], not now, a few years ago, that the refugees who come here [as their first host country] will stay here.

Anna: Yes, that's why we receive some money, to build camps and refugee centres. (Greece, 26-40HE)

Participants discuss the Dublin Regulation as protecting the interests of powerful nations like Germany. In this repertoire, small countries like Greece have a particular function that serves Europe's interests, that's why they receive "some money" to build camps and refugee centres. Greece for example operates as a filter so that capable and skilful refugees can reach their destination, whereas the rest remain stuck in the country. Northern Europeans, especially the Germans, are portrayed as lacking humanity and solidarity, they don't care about the Greeks nor the refugees. The refugee crisis, like in Germany, was discussed as "immigration crisis" among right-wing participants, who would express xenophobic and racist attitudes towards "the foreigners". In this excerpt we notice Vivi's reference to Greece becoming "a bit like the sewer of Europe", and the general problematization of refugee accommodation and employment in a crisis-ridden environment.

All in all, the refugee flows seeking asylum in Europe were discursively constructed as a crisis at the national level mainly in Germany. Participants portrayed an environment of material, symbolic and political threats triggered by a sense of invasion and a potential cultural clash between the locals and the foreigners. At the same time, politicians appeared to silence citizens instead of opening the debate on the issue. In Greece, the refugee crisis was portrayed as a humanitarian crisis affecting Europe as a whole. It was perceived as adding further complexity to the ongoing financial and political crises in the country.

5.2.2. Discursive performance: Cultural clash in Germany, discrimination against wealthy Europeans in Greece

The refugee crisis was discussed as affecting disproportionally the German people due the strong economy and quality of democracy in the country. Participants raised concerns over refugee integration based on previous experience with mainly Muslim populations that in their view would not adapt to the host society. They reached consensus that "either we can't do it, or maybe with less people, or actually, we don't want to". Participants introduced the "cultural clash"

interpretative repertoire to underline concerns over the large numbers to be received, the lack of state provision, and the problem of integration. In this repertoire, a relatively small village receives multiple times its population in refugees/foreigners (depending on the ideological orientation of the discussant) (18-25HE, 26-40HE, 61+LE). The repertoire was inspired by real events in lower Saxony, where the government's plan to build a refugee centre was met with intense anti-refugee mobilization.

> *Susanne: So, if you now have a certain area or region or village, I don't think it's right to say that we're going to bring 1000 refugees here, in a village of 300 people, no, that's also wrong, in my opinion. You need to ask the people beforehand, how do you find this plan, can you deal with it? Or up to what number would it be okay for you?*
>
> *Jasmin: But nobody asked me or stopped me from moving to Berlin. I didn't ask the Berliners, 'hey how would you like it if I moved here'.*
>
> *Susanne: No, I just meant a small village, where everyone knows everybody, you know. And if there are 300 people and they say...*
>
> *Jasmin: But this number is quite controversial.*
>
> *Susanne: Well, I think it's just difficult, you know, if you've never seen anyone like that in your life.*
>
> *Anton: Yes, I understand, I also understand the people [in the village].*
>
> *Jasmin: Well, if I was a refugee, I wouldn't like to live in a 300-people village either. But these are also temporary matters, because when the war is over, this is also what the government hopes, then the people will be able to return to their countries.*
>
> *Gudrun: Yes, that won't be the case, we've seen the same with the guest workers [Gastarbeiter], the government hoped a lot back then, but in the end, it didn't turn out to be like that...*
>
> *Jasmin: Yes, and they did Germany good.*
>
> *Gudrun: I'm not saying that they didn't do Germany any good, or that they didn't enrich the country in any way, but they thought about it differently back then. And it's now that we see the effects [of this policy] in our schools, so nothing is fixed and new challenges are coming. So, I find this view a bit naïve to be honest.*
>
> *(Germany, 26-40HE)*

Participants exaggerate the ratio between the numbers of refugees to be received and the population of the small village to suggest that the refugees are too many and the locals have the democratic right to decide if and where they want to host them. One participant (Jasmin) attempts to counter anti-immigration discourse but the rest provide arguments why in general "they had enough". Some participants, mainly left-wing, agreed with Chancellor Merkel that "we can do it" and urged to open up empty spaces for refugee accommodation. The majority, however, and especially right-wing participants, expressed sentiments of Islamophobia and constructed an environment of "cultural clash". Muslim culture was portrayed as religious, radical and

intolerant, and thus incompatible with German culture. These expressions were often introduced with the structure, "I have nothing against refugees, but…" as to shield discussants against accusations of discrimination and racism (Van Dijk, 1992). In general, participants highlighted a pro-refugee consensus, marginalizing or silencing opposite views on the matter. Chancellor Merkel, the EU and other Europeans not showing solidarity were blamed for the crisis.

On the other hand, participants in Greece expressed sentiments of solidarity with the refugees. They identified with the weak since they perceived themselves to be powerless in Europe. This was also a strategy of positive differentiation from "the rich but insensitive Europeans" who do not share their good fortune with people in need, as was indicated in their view, with the financial and refugee crises. Participants portrayed the refugee crisis as a European matter related to oil-wars in the MENA region and imperialism. In this repertoire, super-powers like America, Russia and Europe engage in conflicts in foreign regions, but then complain when refugees ask for asylum. Discussants presented a culture of hospitality in the country, deflecting accusations of racism to the "wealthy northern Europeans". They repeatedly brought examples of what they perceived as "the rise of fascism" in northern Europe, even though the way they referred to refugees indicated also racist attitudes (Greece as the sewer of Europe, refugees taking jobs, being a burden).

> *Vivi: I think that the educated and civilized Europeans, who have nothing to do with the lack of organization and governance in Greece, the only thing they wish is to keep the refugee hordes away from their clean homes, and they don't care where they end up.*
>
> *Aggeliki: Their geographical location is also such that they don't care. If I lived in Austria now, with high mountains all around that nobody can cross, I wouldn't care either what the refugees are doing in Greece.*
>
> *Vivi: This is true, they only care when they want to use them as cheap labour.*
>
> *Aggeliki: For the same reason, I'm not afraid of terrorist attacks, because I don't live in Spain or France. It may happen here too at some point, but this is not my biggest fear when I enter the metro. Because I don't send army in other countries to bomb people.* (*Greece, 41-60HE*)

Participants in Greece discuss the refugee crisis as related to the arms industry, warfare and consequent rise in terrorist attacks. Discussants propose that they are not afraid of terrorism because they show solidarity with the refugees. They instead take the opportunity to discriminate against the "civilized Europeans", who don't share their good fortune with others. What is missing from the argumentation, however, is that Greece also participates in these wars since it is a NATO member and exploits migrants for cheap labour. There is xenophobia and racism in

Greek society too, but it is silenced and projected onto others (Galariotis et al., 2017). Even though sentiments of Islamophobia were not prominent, a bias towards western civilization and its supposed connection to Greek philosophy and democracy was present in most discussions. All in all, responsibility for the causes of the refugee crisis in Greece was by and large attributed to powerful nations. The EU was blamed for not protecting the rights of the people, while promoting the interests of big nations and corporations.

5.2.3. Subject positioning: Germans as foreigners in own country, Greeks as traditionally hospitable people

Participants in Germany overall constructed an environment of "cultural conflict" caused by years of mass immigration. They engaged in fine-grained distinctions between poor and rich refugees, "worthy" fugitives and "unworthy" economic migrants. Yet, it was the incompatibility of "Muslim" refugees with Christian liberal democracies that was underlined. There was general consensus that refugees need to integrate by speaking the language and behaving in accordance to tolerant, secular, German norms.

> *Anastasia: People always say that the refugees must integrate and so on, but what kind of torture they've left behind, sometimes they're on the road for four years, through the desert, across the sea, and now they have finally solid ground under their feet and suddenly everybody shouts: but they don't speak our language*
>
> *Doris: Yes, but I think everything is happening too fast. They always talk about the German labour market and I know that the people are traumatized, they have to get here first, they need a warm bed. But if one gets food or accommodation faster than the other, they become disrespectful and you see these conflicts in the camps, because they may not attack us, but they attack each other, the Christians against the Muslims, women against men and so on. Because they are dissatisfied. As Brecht says, when one is hungry…*
>
> *Armin: Exactly, you need integration, you need to make sure that they speak German. In my neighbourhood of 100 people, I'm the only one who speaks German. I find it important that they get German language courses, because without the language, it's just impossible.*
>
> *Anastasia: But you need to treat people with respect and acknowledge the value of each person, my god, not because they are here but because they are human beings… And you need to enlighten people and explain to them that these are not just poor people who come here but also educated people and young people who have dreams…*
>
> *Armin: Article 1 of human rights: The dignity of a human being is inviolable.*
>
> *Doris: But they aren't supposed to bring their conflict here, it's such an extreme religious conflict. I have nothing against refugees, but I don't like any radicals here in general, any people radicalizing themselves. And that's the fear many people have I think, because Germany isn't a religious country, religion has nothing to do with our politics.*

> *Igor: But of course, it's difficult for us to communicate these things. There are of course many who are well-behaved, nice and friendly, but there are also some, nobody knows if there are ISIS fighters among them, you always don't know, because meanwhile Germany has become a target and of course people are scared.*
> *(Germany, 26-40LE)*

Participants empathize with refugees' tormented life stories on their way to safety and stability in Europe. In particular Anastasia (26-40LE), representing left-wing discourse, introduces a humanitarian repertoire arguing for the undeniable value of human life. She identifies with the weak and attempts to confront stereotypes by reminding discussants that refugees are "people like us", who worked hard to pursue their dreams but because of war and famine had to leave their homes. Although participants agree with her position initially, they present numerous "rational" objections (job market, language, education, culture, religion, social cohesion) to unconditional reception. The biggest issue refers to the cultural clash between the locals and the foreigners. The Germans are portrayed as secular, moderate, law-abiding and ordered citizens that welcome refugees, but at the same time feel threatened. The foreigners are described as cultural norm breakers, unwilling to integrate in the host society, and in extreme cases potential criminals and terrorists. Critical repertoires in Germany differentiated between poor and rich refugees, arguing that whereas rich cosmopolitans and corporations evading taxes are not portrayed as problematic in media and political discourse, it is the poor, those that actually need aid and solidarity, who are depicted as burden. Other Europeans were also perceived as lacking solidarity and responding with racist policies, especially the Eastern Europeans and the British. The Greeks were once again discussed as receivers of solidarity funds in order to manage the refugee crisis.

On the other hand, participants in Greece described the population as "traditionally hospitable people", who may be poor but share their few resources with people in need, even amidst the crises. Instead, they accused the "wealthy northern Europeans" of selfishness and discrimination. Right-wing participants justified hospitality by rooting it to national culture, whereas left-wing participants underlined solidarity motives. Although specific references to Muslim refugees and Islam were uncommon, othering expressions like "these people", differentiation between legal and illegal status, refugees and economic migrants, were present. However, it was once again the "wealthy Europeans" that were approached as "others", placing money higher than human life.

Minas (to Lina): Even though you mentioned the [top-ranking] education system in Sweden, and despite the fact that the Swedes are highly educated people, you also notice the rise of the radical right over there, and indeed the Swedes are very nationalist, like we are.

Lina: I don't agree that the Swedes are highly educated people.

Olga: We are not nationalists.

Minas: We are very much nationalists. Otherwise, Golden Dawn wouldn't be the third party in the parliament. It shouldn't even be in the parliament.

Olga: I think this was just a reaction. If we were nationalists, we wouldn't go to the islands and the cities to help these people. We wouldn't care if they're cold, if they're hungry, if they suffer, if they're ill. We Greeks are traditionally very hospitable people, that's why you cannot call us nationalists. The real meaning of nationalism is something else.

Minas: Anyway, indeed there are those who aren't nationalists. But there are also the others, I know it very well, I feel it as a German. Every time I mention that I'm half German, I'm scared. (Greece, 41-60 LE)

The northern Europeans were categorized as more nationalists than the Greeks, despite their supposed wealth and education. Especially the Germans were commonly perceived as historically flirting with authoritarianism. When accusations of racism and nationalism were brought to their attention, like with the rise of the far-right party Golden Dawn, participants would present this development as a reaction to the severity of the crisis to minimize its appeal (Angouri & Wodak, 2014). They would also switch the discussion to the numerous solidarity initiatives for refugees in Greece. However, a rise in solidarity can go hand in hand with a rise in nationalism in a polarized political environment. Participants seem to silence this ambivalence.

5.3. The political crisis

5.3.1. Social construction: Corruption and post-democracy in Greece and Germany

Participants in Greece and Germany discussed the post-democratic crisis of representation in their countries and Europe in very similar ways. The corruption of mainstream labour and conservative parties, losing their representative function, was a common interpretative repertoire (cartel party thesis, Katz & Mair, 1995; 2009). As mainstream parties moved to the centre, their long-time supporters were unable to find meaningful programmatic differences between the centre-left and the centre-right, and were contemplating endorsing more ideologically distinct left and right-wing parties. This cartel party alliance and lack of substantial options in electoral politics signified corruption and a democracy in crisis for the majority. The post-democratic turn was common in Greece and Germany, with Greece of course facing a more severe crisis due to

pre-existing problems of clientelism (Pappas, 2003). Participants defined post-democracy (Crouch, 2004) as a secret alliance between politicians, business and the media that has led to the de-politicization of democracy. Political decisions are taken by a group of experts behind closed doors, while citizens' demands are approached as "populist" in the public debate. Discussants expressed from mild to severe sentiments of political disenchantment and Euroscepticism, with the level of discontent in Germany emerging as a surprising finding.

I will start with Greece where the political crisis erupted earlier in 2010. Politicians were seen to be imposing poverty and misery on the population without offering any meaningful justifications for their course of action. They were blamed for breaking promises and prioritizing economic interests at the expense of community and society for years. Participants constructed a crisis of responsiveness, since irrespective of citizen mobilization against austerity in the streets and the ballots (Indignant movement, SYRIZA, EU referendum), they received the same austerity policies. They suggested also a crisis of responsibility, because no political power prepared them for the severity of the financial crisis, took responsibility for the situation, or proposed an exit strategy to tackle the problem. In the words of Kostas (41-60HE), "*it has been already 6-7 years that we haven't formed our own opinion about the crisis, and propose our own rescue plan. There's obviously a problem of responsibility, representation and governance".*

The crisis of democracy in Greece was attributed to the two mainstream parties (labour PASOK and conservative New Democracy) establishing clientelist relations with the electorate, which minimized their programmatic differences. As a result, both parties were delegitimized and punished in the critical elections of 2012 and 2015, with the labour PASOK receiving harsher punishment and being practically replaced by the radical left SYRIZA. Although participants acknowledged the problem of political corruption in the country, they suggested that the trend in western democracies is similar. The problem lies in the exploitation of positions of great political and economic power.

> *Savvas: In my view it's democracy that doesn't work. If democracy doesn't work then nothing else does. I agree with all of you saying that there's no rule of law, no justice. I think it's an outcome of politics as it was practiced till now. It's a matter of culture and education. Because we were raised in a situation that we all asked for [political] favours.*
>
> *Kiki: Not all of us*
>
> *Liza: Not everybody*

Savvas: I'm not referring to you personally.

Liza: These are specific people, not all people.

Savvas: I'm just saying that there were many people participating in this situation. One big group is the public sector. These people were the clients of the two big parties [PASOK, New Democracy]

Kiki: Exactly

Liza: Otherwise, they wouldn't get elected.

Savvas: That's why I say that this is a crisis of democracy. Democracy doesn't function properly. There's no meritocracy, no equality, no justice, there's nothing, nothing.

Liza: Yes, democracy has been jeopardized, don't you think?

Kiki: How is it possible to usurp public funds [reference to major political scandals] and nobody can touch you? Please tell me in which [civilized] country is this possible?

Savvas: Well, I believe that politics works in a similar way everywhere. Because you referred to Europe for instance, there are lobbies everywhere.

Kiki: Like in Greece? [participants laughing]

Savvas: Yes here of course it's more obvious because we live in a country that has neither achieved great [economic] development nor exerted great influence on the global capitalist system. Yet these things happen everywhere, look at France and [the scandal with] the mirage jets. (Greece, 61+LE)

Clientelism resulted in the two mainstream parties getting re-elected despite the large corruption scandals involving them. Citizens were also hired in the public sector even though they may have lacked the skills for these positions. Participants appear conscious of pre-existing problems that led to the financial and political meltdown. Yet there is an issue of justice as they point out straight away. Not all citizens and politicians were engaged in clientelism and corruption. By blaming everyone for the crisis ("we're all in this together"), the real perpetrators remain unknown till present time. This lack of justice and responsibility in Greece leaves the door open for all sorts of blame attributions because citizens are deprived of crucial information that has empirical basis. In this environment of constant pauperization and democratic degeneration, the "Troika" was perceived as a "foreign" technocratic institution that imposed misery from afar by dictating policies that went against the interests of the majority (wage and pension cuts, tax increases, public sector layoffs etc.).

Anna: I believe that not even these people govern Greece, everything comes from higher levels. PM Tsipras organized the referendum, I really believed in him, even though I didn't vote for him. He triggered hope, there was hope again. Definitely they didn't let him follow the NO vote [61% voted NO to more austerity].

Vivi: Yes, he had a problem.

Anna: Neither Greece has the final word, nor political leaders anymore.

Vivi: You suggest that there are secret lobbies pulling the strings.

Anna: They are not secret. The EU and all these institutions don't let you get back on your feet.

Vivi: Yes, but these things are known for the EU.

Anna: The same happened with PM Karamanlis [former prime minister], no?

Makis: The same happens with everyone [participants laughing]. Earlier it was the NATO bothering us, then it was America, now it's the EU. There were always influences [on Greek politics].

Anna: Actually, we always had corrupt politicians selling out the country.

Vivi: Yes, this has happened since the establishment of the Greek state.

Aggeliki: It's not only a problem of Greece, it's a problem of all countries. It's not that they have targeted Greece these lobbies from abroad to manipulate politics. It's the way things work at the moment.

Makis: Exactly. This is the situation and whoever can deal with it now.

Vivi: After all these institutions after all these Unions, I mean the European Union with the high ideals, [we see] that it's basically an interaction among countries that reminds us of previous relations between the strong and the weak. (Greece, 26-40HE)

Among the few times Greek participants used the word "hope" was to refer to the unexpected election of the left-wing party SYRIZA, and the proposed referendum on austerity – even among those that did not vote for the party. They believed that austerity can be resisted and citizens can have a say on how politics works in their country. Yet the inability of the party to materialize the outcome of the referendum and the EU's indisputable stance on the matter made participants believe that external forces control their future. These forces want them poor and dependent on powerful nations (America, Germany). Participants argue that "this is how things work at the moment". Politicians don't pull the strings, but lobbies. Left-wing and right-wing discussants conceded on the democratic deficit triggered by the crisis. A common interpretative repertoire suggested that "important political decisions about Greece are taken in the offices of Brussels and NATO" (Activists).

Corruption, moneyed interests, and the EU were also major topics in Germany. Participants introduced a crisis of responsiveness, as Chancellor Merkel and the grand coalition proceeded with bailing out Greece and receiving large numbers of refugees without taking into consideration citizens' views on the matter. They expressed repeatedly the feeling that they are silenced, and that everything that has to do with the future of the country is decided on higher levels, echoing their Greek counterparts. Participants discussed in length the lack of political options in the electoral arena, with the grand coalitions between the conservative CDU and labour

SPD leaving citizens on the moderate right and left unrepresented in the public sphere. A common interpretative repertoire referred to German politicians being too far away from the "little people" [*Bürgerfern*] yet very close to business interests. They brought repeatedly the example of the "secret TTIP negotiations" between the federal government, the EU and the US to support their position. "Puppets of the economy" and "money-oriented politics" were particular terms used to exemplify political corruption.

> *Konrad: But why is the TTIP completely ok for the Federal Government? And why is the chlorinated chicken not so bad for them? Because they can afford the eco-chicken anyway? Or why does the Federal government allow such thing to be negotiated in secret? The whole population, I think two thirds, are against it according to the latest opinion polls. That's a clear result, isn't it?*
>
> *Pauline H.: Because they want to promote their interests.*
>
> *Konrad: Yes, the question is, where do they live, what do they eat, where do they move, what are they afraid of, right? I refer to all topics now, TTIP is just an example. I believe that the federal government is trapped in lobbyists' associations. I don't want to say now 'puppets of the economy' but this is the direction.*
>
> *Pauline H.: Yes, you see that when they say something, now also with the refugees and so on, you always have the feeling that in the back of their mind they only think: How do I save my post? They don't care about the matter itself, it's always about not saying the wrong sentence, not saying the wrong word. You see the same with Gabriel [the Vice Chancellor at the time], he wants to become the next Chancellor.*
>
> *Ingrid: Yes, and you notice that when someone from the political life loses his/her post in the Bundestag or is retired or something, they somehow end up in the economy, as advisors or something. We have seen this many times before.*
>
> *Otto: They earn a lot more there.*
>
> *Alexander: The best example is Schröder…*
>
> *Ingrid: And Gazprom…*
>
> *Alexander: That's totally embarrassing, but not for him.* *(Germany, 41-60HE)*

German politicians are portrayed as corrupt and selfish. They make electoral promises that they never keep, and are essentially the same people in power (SPD and CDU like PASOK and New Democracy). Participants seem aware of the post-democratic state of affairs. As they argue, "most of them somehow end up in the economy" – the "revolving door" interpretative repertoire. The example of Chancellor Schröder (from SPD) and his close ties to the Russian energy company Gazprom was brought up recurrently to indicate corruption. These political scandals and neoliberal reforms introduced by the left-green coalition in 2002-2005 appear to have weakened the labour SPD and delegitimized left-wing alternatives to austerity (Saalfeld & Schoen, 2015). In addition, the EU was perceived as contributing to these crises, instead of

providing solutions. European peace and lifestyle issues, such as freedom of travel, exchange of goods and services, meeting other Europeans, were positively evaluated. However, when discussing politics, German participants expressed deep dissatisfaction with current affairs.

> *Walter: The EU, the Euro, the Greeks, nobody talks about the Greeks anymore who seem to have money again. But the topic will come back again. Well, before it bothered me that the Greeks were gagged like they weren't a democratic country anymore, they cannot decide for themselves without the Troika or the institutions, or whatever is their name, telling them what to do. That's actually a no-go. But what bothers me much more now with the refugees is that the EU is very much ahead with solidarity [Irony]. Some say they don't want any, others say they only want Christians although it's Muslims that are coming, there are hardly any Christians. The Hungarians will take two or three people, and so they cannot agree now on how to distribute the people. That's not the solidarity I have in mind when I think of Europe, and the so-called values that are always held high in Europe, which quickly go down the drain, a heavy disappointment*
>
> *Jörg: Well, the EU is basically also one of these clubs where every country wants to push its individual interests, and that's difficult I think, with so many countries that are partly so different. Maybe just as a train of thought, maybe the EU shouldn't have evolved to this extent of the common currency union.*
>
> *Laurenz: So, if the UK or Poland want to fight for their national interests, they can do it; or if Poland or other countries regard the EU only as money supply, so they can renew their streets but mutual solidarity is not expected. Seeing everything as a one-way street mustn't be the case. When those who pay the most are also burdened with the problems of others, at that moment something is wrong. (Germany, Activists)*

Participants in Germany appear disappointed with the way the crises were dealt with at the European level, bearing most of the burden themselves instead of sharing it equally and fairly among member-states. As shown in this excerpt, some left-wing participants sympathised with their Greek counterparts enduring post-democratic policies decided on higher levels. Europe as a peace project and political union of collaboration among member states is contrasted to the EU, an economic club where countries pursue their national interests and exploit wealthy economies as money supply. A sense of mistrust, lack of solidarity and common fate among member states is expressed, and disenchantment with the current form of the EU.

Overall, the crisis of representation and legitimacy in Greece was known and expected. What was not expected was the level of political discontent and Euroscepticism expressed in the German focus groups; as well as the level of awareness and agreement among Greek and German discussants about the root causes of the political crises in their countries and Europe. The post-democratic crisis of representation at the national level is caused by corruption and political convergence of mainstream labour and conservative parties. At the European level, the political crisis emerges from the lack of transparency, accountability and representation in the EU. The intensity differs though. Participants in Greece construct a situation of unofficial bankruptcy and

state collapse triggering a generalized crisis of legitimacy. The critical presence of an external supervising actor, "the Troika", aggravates the sense of democratic deficit and loss of political sovereignty. Germany's capacity to tackle the financial crisis in a relatively effective manner has prevented a legitimacy crisis of such severity.

5.3.2. Discursive performance: Political disenchantment and Euroscepticism in Greece and Germany

Although the root causes and intensity of the political crises in Greece and Germany differ, participants' criticism of current affairs was rather similar. Discussants in both countries proposed that democracy is broken. Politicians and the EU were explicitly blamed for listening to the markets and their wallets more than the citizens. The level of political awareness was considerably high in both countries. Instead of engaging with a superficial anti-politics repertoire devoid of depth and rational argumentation, the majority of discussants provided extensive reasoning and real-life examples for their responsibility attributions. Citizens received their fair share of blame as well: for allowing politicians to exploit their vote for personal gains in Greece; and for being passive and complacent due to the wealth and prosperity in Germany. As suggested in Chapter 2, blame avoidance presents the speakers and their social groups in a positive light, but it is acknowledging responsibility that may assist with identifying the root causes of the problem. As Rosa points out in the following excerpt, by blaming others for the generalized and multiple crises in the country, Greek citizens could avoid realizing their own contribution to the problematic situation and how to refrain from repeating similar mistakes in the future.

> *Rosa: I disagree when people say that they're disappointed with politicians and corruption and the like. I wonder whether those participating in this situation are less or more than the non-participants. Yet they say in Greece today that all politicians lie and cheat, that they've destroyed us in order to pardon themselves, to pardon ourselves, because what was going on all these years is that we were voting for these people, I don't say I'm good, but we were voting for these people because they're our mirror, and we still vote for them because corruption has been passed down to our society. Since I graduated from university and I was hired in the ministry that was the approach, I'm not saying it was 90% of the cases, but that was the tone more or less in society.*
>
> *Koula: While they (politicians) held governmental offices.*
>
> *Rosa: Yes, they held governmental offices, but we were voting them in, right?*
>
> *Koula: People's vote depended on what they get from politicians. Clientelist state.*
>
> *Rosa: So, I believe it's time to blame ourselves. Because we always blame others, the foreigners, the government, [Chancellor] Merkel and so on, because we cannot admit this to ourselves, otherwise we'll have to negate ourselves.* *(Greece, 61+HE)*

Politicians and citizens voting them in office were the first to be held accountable for the political crisis. Additionally, Greek participants expressed a critical repertoire towards globalization and to a lesser extent towards European integration. Globalization was portrayed as economic, cultural and political subordination of the global/European periphery to the global/ European centre, among left- and right-wing participants.

> *Platonas: My problem is not so much with Europe as with globalization. A big deal of the problems that Greece is facing, and other peripheral countries of Europe, of the global South, is due to this violent adaptation. Meaning this violent homogenization of different countries, cultures and political systems. This is a race to the bottom for labour rights, social cohesion, health insurance, education, which in the name of globalization is differentiated in three broad cultures, establishes a global language and generates populations instead of nations. Thus, to be a citizen is neither to be Athenian, nor Peloponnese, nor Greek, nor European, it means to be a consumer.*
>
> *Andreas: I think the problem is the management of human labour. Because the way things work at the moment is that there are places in the world which have different capacity to manage their production. So "crusaders" come along, Americans, Russians, Germans etc. who are stronger and exploit other peoples' production. What we experience [in Greece] is the continuation of this behaviour. Meaning that a leading group is managing the power of those who produce, since the latter cannot manage their own production, while others come and exploit it. For instance, they go to Africa and sell weapons and the people there slaughter each other and nobody says anything. Lately there was a terrible massacre in Syria. This is what they do in Latin America, Africa, everywhere. (Greece, 61+HE)*

Participants portray globalization as a race to the bottom for labour rights, public services, social cohesion and democracy. These processes are presented to be driven by motives of profit and exploitation against poor peoples (core-periphery, north-south). This exploitation is facilitated by super powers (Americans, Russians, Germans in this excerpt) using politics of debt-bondage and warfare to obtain resources from Africa and Latin America. The Greek crisis is portrayed as a continuation of this unequal development that now reaches Europe.

Moving to Germany, participants blamed explicitly the mainstream parties CDU and SPD for not taking into consideration citizen disenchantment and representing their interests in the public sphere. They also held citizens accountable for passivity and complacency due to the country's wealth and prosperity [*Bequemlichkeit*]. The multiple and multilevel crises appear to have underlined the representation gap between politicians and citizens in the financial crisis (no Greek aid), refugee crisis (less refugees), and political crisis (parties too similar, no alternatives).

> *Susanne: So, I'm going to vote, but I feel so shaken every time, because in principle it's always the same in power anyway. So, whether I go now or not, the result is always almost identical, with a few deviations. And if I now vote for a different party, I know very well that it will never be in power, or anyway in my lifetime.*
>
> *Jasmin: So I think there's been a change of power in the last years, at the federal and state level.*

Susanne: But it's always about the two, SPD and CDU.

Jasmin: There's a green-governed state, Baden-Württemberg, and it's the second largest state.

Anton: But in foreign policy, most of them, for example, in the case of Greece, most of them, the Greens, FDP, SPD and CDU agreed with each other… Almost unanimously. So, the majority of the SPD agreed with the financial aid to Greece and the majority of the Greens voted for it.

Jasmin: Yes, that's one example.

Anton: One example, exactly. With foreign policy now, I say ok.

Jasmin: Yes, there's a difference whether one advocates for arms exports or not…

Gudrun: Yes, but I cannot separate this position, this is the challenge. I cannot say unfortunately that in this policy area I agree with this party and in another area with another party, especially when they form a grand coalition.

Anton: But I think the problem is not only with the voters but also with those who are voted upon. The supply of politicians is very important.

Gudrun: Yes there are no charismatic people [in politics] anymore. If you listen to them, you're gone. There's no rhetorician anymore, at most Mr. Gysi [prominent politician of the left Die Linke], who is also leaving now… So when I listen to Mrs. Merkel, she's pure sleep and she probably wants it too.

Jasmin: But that speaks rather, that's an argument against her but she's nevertheless still in power. People voted for a sleeping pill and one with terrible politics. (Germany, 26-40HE)

Participants in Germany referred repeatedly to the lack of viable alternatives in the party arena [*Parteiverdrossenheit]*. Politicians were seen as missing charisma and vision. Although some participants applauded Chancellor Merkel for her powerful leadership, generally, there was severe criticism over her policies. "A sleeping pill with terrible politics" as discussants suggest in the excerpt. Politicians make these grand coalitions and their programmatic differences based on which they are elected, disappear. A common interpretative repertoire indicated that citizens are fooled in every election and there was a strong tendency towards collective electoral abstention or punishment of mainstream parties, so that politicians get the message that people had enough. Participants blamed non-responsive politicians also in the EU. The level of Euroscepticism in the discussions was unexpectedly severe. Lack of information on the proceedings of the institution was perceived as deliberate and indicative of its democratic deficit. In Germany it was the issue of democratic representation and legitimacy in European and international institutions that was more thoroughly problematized than inequality and exploitation.

Alexander: It's really abstract, isn't it? So, who, who is the EU?

Otto: Far away, very far away.

Konrad: A paper tiger, too big.

Alexander: So, the laws that are implemented in the member states are determined by the EU. Yet the officials of the EU are not elected but appointed by the governments, and I find this undemocratic. This is an organisation which, in my view, depends very much on lobbyists, and they're relatively open about it; they decide something that the majority of the population may consider to be quite nonsense.

Pauline C.: Wait a minute, the European Parliament is elected, but not in all countries or what do you mean? We elect our MEPs.

Alexander: But what about all the officials who are there?

Pauline C.: You have an administration, of course, but they are like two pairs of shoes. I think, I don't know exactly, but we have a European election.

Alexander: I also have to admit, I don't know exactly, it's so far away.

Konrad: There's the European Parliament and then there's the European Commission. We elect the members of the Parliament but the others are determined by the member states.

Alexander: Well, we elect the parliament but the EU is a much larger organization. And I feel somehow...

Ingrid: …That something is manipulated, that the EU is not determined by us.

Alexander: Well, I have the sense that only a very small part is determined by us, yes this is what I think. I somehow have a bad feeling about it to be honest. (Germany, 41-60HE)

Participants in Germany seem confused about the bodies, instruments and processes in the EU. Although they vote in European elections, they perceive to exert limited influence on European matters, as was manifest, in their view, with the Greek bailouts and the refugee crisis. The EU is described as a lobbyist association oriented towards economic interests rather than European citizens. Particular distinction is made between the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council, with discussants referring to the "undemocratic procedure" of appointing officials instead of democratically electing them. The importance of a strong parliament was underlined for meaningful representative democracy at the European level.

5.3.3. Subject positioning: The "little people" vs. the "rich corrupt politicians" in Greece and Germany

Participants in Greece and Germany positioned on the one hand "the little people" that have to live in harsh conditions and face a pessimistic future; and on the other hand, the politicians, who live like "kings and queens" in closed communities and have become even richer amidst the crises. The little people seem to get fooled in every election to vote for political parties that appear different but share essentially the same interests. Banks, lobbies and multinationals are seen as part of the secret alliance between political and economic interests, while citizens are left

out of the deal. The following two excerpts from Greece and Germany respectively highlight participants' shared subject positioning.

> *Kosmas: It's always the same in power. And they look after their families more than they care about society.*
>
> *Savvas: Yes, unfortunately a lot of hope is lost, hope that things could get better eventually.*
>
> *Liza: I feel disappointment. Great disappointment. Not only with politics in Greece, but also in Europe. I grew up with the word "austerity" since I was a kid. I'm getting old and I hear this word again, it's imposed on me to live in austerity. And this austerity, from what I can recall, is worse than the austerity I encountered when I was a kid. In the 1950s and 1960s there were the poor and the rich. So, some people thought that the poor shouldn't become middle class, there's no need, they should go back to where they came from. So that there's poverty and wealth, like in Venezuela or other poor countries. Hence, I don't believe politicians. Nobody. I don't believe that any of them loves their country so much as to improve the situation. (Greece, 61+LE)*
>
> *Konstantin: You can imagine that there are also insane hierarchies in these parties and if you go there perhaps as a new, young, fresh thinking person, you cannot go very far.*
>
> *Jennifer: It's also about income...*
>
> *Konstantin: Yes, sure, definitely.*
>
> *Jennifer: You really have to say it. It's about income. It's completely independent of whether it's dark red, red, black, green, we can also add purple, yellow, it doesn't matter at all, it's about pay, who has B5, B6 and a fancy for federal politics. So, don't even think that our health senator would be very keen on what he's doing. He just wants to work at the federal level. Well, that's what it's all about, and I find it disgusting, it's all about power. (Germany, 41-60LE)*

Participants in Greece and Germany identify with a country of residence and a community for which they care about. Politicians on the other hand are portrayed as an international class that has no borders and love for their country. Their country is money. With regard to the EU, participants perceive the institution as non-transparent and non-democratic, promoting vested interests at the expense of the people and the common good (Europe). Discussants in both countries seem to prefer a union of member states that share a common continent and identity, and similar economic, social and political predicament. Despite their similarities though, there were also differences. Participants in Greece perceived the EU as promoting the interests of powerful member states such as Germany and France. Contrary, participants in Germany portrayed themselves as the biggest contributors in the EU sharing also the biggest burden, while other Europeans free ride. Hence, discussants in both countries were portrayed as the victims of Europe's inequalities.

> *Aggeliki: I think the EU has abandoned all pretence; it's not needed anymore. That's what I understood in the summer [with the referendum]. It's very simple, guys this is the situation, whether you like it or not,*

that's life. It's ok, you'll be the first, your neighbours later, the Portuguese after, everyone will get a taste eventually. It may be that in 1830 [establishment of the Greek state] this behaviour was crystal clear, but in 2015 it's also very clear, even though we've become a bit more civilized Europeans, so to say.

Makis: Every time we take a loan in Greece, we have to apply certain [austerity] measures. In a way you're trapped and black mailed every time, in order to do what you've been told. This debt-bondage dependency on other Europeans is constant in Greek history, we always took loans since the establishment of the state.

Moderator: Thus, the outcome of the referendum could not be applied?

Makis: Yes, it was an illusion, it gave you the [fake] opportunity to express yourself. We saw that, we all voted NO [to more austerity], a defiant NO was elected, but in the parenthesis a YES was hiding. I don't think this could have ever happened in Switzerland for example.

Vivi: Anyway, Switzerland has a very different role in the EU.

Stamatis: Switzerland is not even in the EU.

Vivi: Oh, Switzerland managed this as well. You mean the currency union or the EU?

Stamatis: Switzerland is neither in the currency union [Eurozone] nor in the EU.

Makis: Switzerland has its own god. Well, I'm wondering all this time, why I wasn't born Swiss after all [participants laughing] (Greece, 26-40HE)

Participants in Greece argue that they are treated as second-class citizens in Europe. In 2015, they were still not approached as autonomous people since stronger countries in the EU were seen to impose their will on weaker ones. This debt-bondage dependency on other Europeans is portrayed as a historical reality in Greek politics. Italian and Portuguese neighbours are perceived to experience similar discriminatory behaviour. In juxtaposition, the Swiss are introduced as a counter-example of differential treatment. They are autonomous to behave as they please, they are powerful, they have money, they have their own god, not the EU. Interestingly, participants in Germany expressed also annoyance with their unfair treatment in Europe.

Doris: Well, Europe should actually be a fair distribution of burdens and benefits on all issues. But you always get upset when you have the feeling that it's not a uniform thing. One country becomes more powerful and yes okay, we have more money than other countries, but somehow it doesn't work out fairly.

Armin. The EU was actually founded after the experience of the second World War, so the focal mistake was that it didn't become a political union... Europe is good in principle, especially in a globalized world, because in the near future the centre of the world won't be in Europe but in Africa and Asia… but as we said in the beginning, it's just difficult, 28 countries and every country is so different. Here, we don't agree in Germany [with the federal states], how is it possible to agree in Europe? […]

Doris: Yes, every country is different, and has different economic capacity, you cannot compare now apples and pears, yet they want to pull us all in the same direction. And if everyone is differently positioned in the economy, and in one country there's so much VAT but in another there's almost no VAT, then all companies go to Ireland, because it's more pleasant there.

Igor: Or in Greece, for example, sorry, we're again back in Greece. So I think they retire at 50 or 55 and here you just retire at 67. Either you say that we have one system and it can't be that in other countries people retire much earlier and then in the next country is 70. So how do you want to sell this to the people? I also understand the Greeks of course who say, but we always did that, why should we retire later?

Doris: Yes, it's their right, it's their country. You cannot compare now, that's the difficult part.

Igor: But they retire earlier and they get the same money as someone who works 15 years longer here – in proportion of course. *(Germany, 26-40LE)*

German participants acknowledge the longer stretch of peace among European countries since World War II and the political influence that a united Europe can exert in a globalized world. However, they argue for a meaningful political union where costs and benefits are equally distributed among Europeans, who share similar economic, social and political systems. Compared to other Europeans – the Greeks and the Irish in this excerpt – German participants find themselves working more years and paying more taxes. They suggest that a united Europe is difficult to survive with such discrepancies between countries and they bring the example of the federal states in Germany to substantiate their argument. Participants in both countries distinguished conceptually between the Europe of united peoples/cultures and the EU as a technocratic economic institution.

5.4. Discussion

The chapter presented the social construction of the crises in Greece and Germany, allowing citizens to speak for themselves about the things they deem important. It highlighted complexity in crisis perceptions that is normally suppressed by multi-level comparisons and survey studies. The analysis explored the diverse lines of argumentation on the crises and highlighted the main interpretative repertoires that emerged across age and education groups. The analysis reported also on critical repertoires when these were discussed. That said, I didn't find considerable intergroup variation in crisis constructions within each case. The analysed excerpts, in this and the next chapter, were selected from all focus groups. Arguably, the choice of analytical method – the selection of commonly reproduced interpretative repertoires – affected this finding. Discussion of possible intergroup variation is addressed in the concluding chapter (Chapter 7), proposing avenues for future research. Nonetheless, ideology emerged as a significant factor conditioning interpretation. For that reason, left-wing and right-wing repertoires were highlighted in the analysis. Tables A5.1 and A5.2 summarize the main findings of social construction,

discursive performance and subject positioning in the financial, refugee and political crises in Greece and Germany.

[Table A5.1 about here] [Table A5.2 about here]

The financial crisis affected Greek participants disproportionally. It is described as a "process of constant pauperization" for the majority that is imposed by corrupt politicians and the EU. Participants constructed the crisis as a major capitalist crash and problematized the "neoliberal choice of austerity" as crisis management strategy. They positioned themselves as the underdog in European politics who has to be punished paradigmatically so that other Europeans understand that there is no alternative to austerity and the new world order drafted by powerful nations. Contrary, German participants presented themselves as "responsible and hard-working" Europeans who pay again for others. The crisis is perceived as a matter of Greece and other peripheral European countries and is attributed to their "relaxed and profligate" lifestyle. Yet, German citizens were also affected, albeit to a lesser extent, due to the MoUs/bailouts and European interdependence.

The refugee crisis was constructed as an intimidating crisis mainly in Germany, perceived as a second "foreign invasion" after the migration of guest workers in the 1960s–1970s. Participants introduced the repertoire of "cultural clash", portraying the moderate, secular and tolerant culture of the locals as incompatible with Islam. German politicians and the EU were seen as "destroying" society with their misguided, short-sighted multicultural policies. Participants argued for a welcoming but realistic approach as citizens felt like "foreigners in their own country". On the other hand, Greek participants acknowledged that refugees target wealthy economies like Germany. However, they were also affected as first host countries at the southern border of Europe. They identified with the refugees finding themselves patronized by superpowers and took the opportunity to discriminate against the "rich but insensitive" Europeans. Instead, they presented themselves as "poor but hospitable people".

Participants in Greece and Germany may disagree on the financial and refugee crises, but they agree on the political crisis in their countries and Europe. As argued in the introduction, it is rather because politicians are seen as unable to tackle financial and immigration threats, and represent citizens' interests in the public sphere, that these problem-areas are perceived as "crises" per se. The democratic crisis of representation was constructed as taking place

simultaneously at the national and European level. At the national level it was attributed to corruption and political convergence of mainstream labour and conservative parties (cartel party thesis, Katz & Mair, 1995); and prioritization of business interests at the expense of the citizenry (post-democracy, Crouch, 2004). At the European level, the EU was perceived as a "technocratic institution" that incorporated and amplified this post-democratic state of affairs, due to deficits in transparency, accountability, and representation (Schmidt, 2013). Participants in both cases portrayed, on the one hand, the "little people" that had to learn to live with the crises, and on the other, the "rich and powerful politicians" that were safe in their secluded wealthy communities.

Therefore, what did we learn in terms of social construction, discursive performance, and subject positioning in Greece and Germany from the focus group analysis? Starting with social construction, literature suggests that crises generate conflict in society – material, symbolic, and political – as they are characterized by scarcity of resources and uncertainty regarding the potential consequences of perceived threats (Kriesi, 2014). Yet, the threats that become politicized in the public debate depend on the resonance with citizens' lived realities and discursive contestation in the public sphere (Hay, 1996; Stanley, 2014). The politicization of threats is not coincidental, but embedded in a history of socio-political struggles (cleavages) (Hooghe & Marks, 2018). The focus group analysis indicated that different threats were prioritized in Greece and Germany: namely the economy and politics; and refugees and politics. These threats activated the left – right (economic) and libertarian – authoritarian (cultural) cleavages in society, mainly the economic axis in Greece and the cultural axis in Germany. Centrist labour and conservative parties were perceived as corrupt and incapable of responding effectively to the crises. They were viewed instead as part of the problem. Moreover, Europe emerged as a "new" politicized cleavage, problematizing the locus of political power in complex multilevel polities (Hutter & Kriesi, 2019b). Pro-European and anti-European interpretative repertoires were discussed, but there was general consensus that the current form of the EU is problematic and disconnected from European citizens.

With respect to discursive performance, as Colin Hay (1996: 255) argues, "power resides not only in the ability to respond to crises, but to identify, define, and constitute crises in the first place". In this process particular interpretative repertoires may appear more effective in conveying citizen experience than others (resonance), providing the discursive foundations for

the interpretation of these problem-areas (Benford & Snow, 2000; Gamson, 1992). Overall, participants in Greece and Germany tended to construct versions of crises that portrayed them positively, especially when the crisis in question affected them indirectly and secondarily; meaning the financial crisis in Germany and the refugee crisis in Greece. Deferring responsibility may present discussants as the victims of a problematic situation, but takes away agency, power and control over the situation. Asserting responsibility may be intimidating, but restores agency to the speaker. When the crisis under discussion was predominant – the financial and political crises in Greece, the refugee and political crises in Germany – awareness of citizen responsibility was rather present. The severity and urgency of these multiple and multilevel threats raised consciousness among the citizenry. Participants did not excuse complacent citizens, neither corrupt politicians, while attributions of responsibility extended to the European (the EU) and international level (capitalism, globalization).

Crises are often constructed as turning points in the history of a group, related to shared perceptions of history and collective identities that locate particular subjects as allies and others as opponents (Stråth & Wodak, 2009). In this process of collective positioning, acts of social comparison are important and purposive. Since people strive for positive identification, they tend to attribute positive characteristics to their reference groups and negative to the ones perceived as "others" (Tajfel, 1982; Turner et al, 1987). The greater the conflict between social groups, the greater the discrepancy between positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation (Reese & Lauenstein, 2014). Overall, Greek and German participants approached each other as opponents in Europe rather than allies, introducing certain stereotypes (corrupt lazy Greeks, hegemonic authoritarian Germans), predominantly when the crisis under discussion was felt indirectly. In the political crisis, however, the Greeks and the Germans were echoing each other, discussing very similar problems. It is no coincidence that it was in the political crisis at the European level that Greek and German participants referred explicitly to one another as allies that suffered alike from post-democratic policies decided on higher levels.

In political talk, stereotypes constitute parts of arguments used by the discussants to negotiate power, enhance self-representation and explain inequalities (Theodossopoulos, 2013). Thus, it is no surprise that in a period of scarce resources and uncertainty, citizens in Greece and Germany resort to stereotyping to gain control over a complex reality and present themselves in a

favourable light. Moreover, focal political figures in the two countries engaged in confrontational communication amidst the crises (Sternberg et al., 2018). However, the existence of stereotypes indicates also a problem of European integration at the citizen level and a lack of solidarity between the two publics. Certain dividing lines in Europe between the north and the south, the east and the west emerged in the focus groups. On the other hand, acts of social contextualization were also common. Discussants shared a considerable amount of information about their counterparts in other regions facilitated by the spread of the internet and social media, indicating an advancement of European integration processes. Which of the two tendencies will prevail, the politics of division and competition or alliance and solidarity, remains to be seen as critical junctures are long-term processes that can trigger significant alterations to path-dependent politics (Collier & Munck, 2017).

Having discussed the areas Greek and German participants perceive to be threatening, the next chapter sheds light on their discourse about plausible political strategies to ameliorate this problematic socio-economic and political environment.

Chapter 6. Talking political strategies in the Greek and German crises: Injustice, identity, agency and alternatives. Evidence from the POLPART focus groups.

The previous chapter examined citizens' perceptions of crises in Greece and Germany in order to understand and explain their suggested political strategies to cope with these problem-areas. Distinguishing between financial, refugee and political crises in 2015, I showed that participants in both countries portrayed an environment of multiple and multilevel threats. However, their severity and predominance depended on the country's structural position in the EU, socio-political legacy, democratic quality, and politicians' management capacity. Greece's modest economy, peripheral position and debtor status in the EU has facilitated the emergence of a severe financial and political crisis, with the refugee crisis adding further complexity to human suffering. Greek participants reflected repeatedly on the possibility of revolution and radical social change to alter their grim prospects, as well as emigration opportunities, especially for the youth. Germany's strong economy, powerful position and creditor status in the EU attracted immigration from crisis regions and rendered the refugee crisis and its political (mis)management the most crucial issue in society; with the financial crisis coming secondary. German participants advocated for moderate social change to retain their strong position, shying away from radical political strategies due to the country's contentious history and current powerful status. Yet the crises, signalling a state of emergency, have polarized and radicalized politics in both countries. The EU was perceived as contributing to these crises instead of addressing the problems at their source, but disenchantment with domestic politicians was greater.

As argued in Chapter 3, the way crises are discussed in the two cases introduces specific common problems citizens wish to address (discourse about grievances, injustice); brings in particular political actors citizens identify with to address those issues (discourse about mobilization, identity); and opens up certain possibilities for their remedy while closing down others (discourse about opportunity, agency). For a detailed analysis of citizen discourse about political strategies, I highlighted a number of influential mechanisms. In particular, the chapter will summarize the strategies participants suggest to cope with the crises, their subtleties and level of rupture with the status quo (social construction of political strategies). Within this framework, I will examine the targets of injustice and blame attributions for the crises (injustice), politicized collective identities and the actors they refer to as allies or opponents in the movement

and party arena (identity), levels of agency and efficacy when mobilizing for social change (agency), and plausible alternatives to the post-democratic crisis of representation at the national and European level. As Gamson (1992) argues, citizens are more likely to engage in action when they define a situation as unjust, are able to attribute responsibility for their predicament to specific actors, construct inclusive politicized collective identities, and make use of opportunities and threats in their political environment. In the event that citizens do not or cannot engage in these processes, they are more likely to resort to passivity rather than engagement.

The rest of the chapter presents citizen discourse about the availability, legitimacy and efficacy of political strategies per crisis (financial, refugee, political), with a focus on repertoires of injustice, identity, agency, and alternatives. Each section begins with the case that was most affected by the crisis under discussion.

6.1. The financial crisis

6.1.1. Social construction: Alternative resilience networks in Greece, enough with Greek aid in Germany

With regard to the financial crisis, which was felt predominantly in Greece and was perceived as part of the 2008 global capitalist crash, most participants were in search of radical revolutionary change that could alter their desperate situation of poverty, anxiety, insecurity and depression. They discussed the formation of consumer movements for taxation reduction, alternative barter systems and markets without middle men, even ideas of autarchy and independence from the global economy through multi-communitarian living. Novel strategies referred to alternative forms of resilience such as self-organized solidarity networks and collective civil disobedience to tackle austerity policies and their consequences like house evictions. Contrary in Germany, participants referred to the financial crisis briefly, without engaging in lengthy debates about austerity and capitalism. When mentioning the financial crisis, they tended to discuss the “Greek crisis”, as shown in the previous chapter. Participants expressed a certain fatigue with the “Greek crisis”. They discussed action by institutions at the federal and European level such as bailout packages and Grexit, but abstained from debating individual or collective action strategies. Perceiving the problem as “Greek particularity”, they suggested reformist strategies for the single currency union (Eurozone) and refrained from major anti-capitalist discourse.

In Greece participants suggested a mix of governmental, individual and collective action strategies. At the institutional level, they referred to an introvert market, lacking competitive industries compared to northern European countries. They suggested restarting the economy with a focus on autarchy (producing enough to cover the population's needs) and exports of signature products (wine, olive oil, biological products). At the individual level participants argued for a responsible and critical stance towards money, spending according to their capacity, while avoiding over-consumption and excessive borrowing. However, it was at the collective action level that novel practices were introduced. Five years of ongoing austerity and 25% GDP contraction triggered individualism and competition for reduced resources, but it also brought citizens together. Alternative forms of resilience such as self-organized solidarity networks, alternative barter economy, time banks, collective boycotts and civil disobedience were enacted out of necessity (starvation) and facilitated by a culture of associational networks and communitarian tradition (Kousis, 2017). Particularly interesting were the numerous stories of personal experiences with these initiatives, as providers or receivers of solidarity. The following excerpts discuss time banks and solidarity initiatives:

> *Stamatis: I agree with Vivi about inhumanity and individualism, I see all this, and the degradation of politics, but I think there's a parallel movement, which I don't know if it's that strong, that of solidarity, charity, however you may call it. It's an attempt, since we cannot rely on politicians anymore, we'll do some things, some small things, not overthrowing the regime, some simple everyday things to help.*
>
> *Athanasia: Yes, I've heard there are groups where you can exchange products and services.*
>
> *Vivi: Time banks? These things usually don't work in Greece.*
>
> *Stamatis: But I know that they work.*
>
> *Athanasia: For example, if a plumber comes to your home to fix something, you may go to their home and help their kids with homework.*
>
> *Makis: Like an exchange of services* *(Greece, 26-40HE)*
>
> *Evaggelia: I want to stress that nowadays in Greece there are many, many groups [that help] and they aren't only charities. They're voluntary associations that appear to do something specific but behind the scenes they do much more. And they [the media] don't want to show their work, I know because I participate in many of these. We also collect clothing and food for several communities.*
>
> *Olga: I also know a theatre that did this. They collected baby food and clothes for refugees. There are many initiatives that are currently operating.*
>
> *Evaggelia: And they aren't necessarily big organisations, even schools do it. Last year we collected money for two families that had no electricity. These aren't charities, they're voluntary associations that help people in need.* *(Greece, 41–60 LE)*

Participants in Greece debate the formation of new institutions that function as shock absorbers to the crisis, assisting increasing numbers of people in need, the poor and the homeless, crisis-hit citizens and refugees. Participants argue that it is a parallel movement to the crisis, the inhumanity and individualism that was triggered with the pauperization and precarization of large segments of the population. They point out that these institutions emerged out of necessity and solidarity, a necessary alternative to reliance on politicians. Although rooted in community and self-organization, participants suggest that this is not the revolution, highlighting the limitations of these initiatives. One participant (Vivi) is dismissing them as utopian with a generalization (these things *usually* don't work) – she doesn't doubt their presence but their efficacy – yet the rest provide personal examples of their function. Personal experiences and factual knowledge were more persuasive than generalizations and popular wisdom when disagreement emerged, especially when supported by more than one discussant. The dissenting participant(s) would either soften their critique reaching middle ground if persuaded by argumentation, or otherwise would keep their initial position (agree to disagree). In the excerpt, Vivi (26-40HE) softens her critique by adding the temporal adverb "usually" to her argument, leaving room for alternative positions. Overall, participants tended to agree on the significance of solidarity initiatives for Greek society.

On the other hand, referring to the financial crisis participants in Germany would discuss the "Greek crisis". They were annoyed with the multiple bailout packages that did not seem to solve the problem but increased their taxes. In the words of Alexander (41-60 HE), "*I don't know how much aid we've provided already, the fourth or fifth [package]? It's an issue and it costs much more than the refugees."*. Greece received three bailouts by 2015, but Alexander exaggerates their number to express his frustration. German participants did not suggest particular strategies at the individual and collective action level in the financial/Greek crisis. Lack of information on the politics of another country, perceived corruption and the "Greek particularity" argument, personal problems and individualism were among the reasons provided for distancing themselves from acts of solidarity. The "Greek crisis" was seen as tackled at the level of institutions. In the nine focus groups there was only one reference to a possible solidarity initiative, which was rejected swiftly for the reasons mentioned. Indicative of the frustration with the matter, participants suggested that in the event of a referendum (a la Greek style) on the

financial aid to Greece, the most plausible outcome would be a resounding "NO" (Jan, 18-25LE) or Grexit (Sacha, 41-60LE).

> *Jens: Donate to Greece [laughter]. A joke.*
>
> *Anton: You could go on holiday there and support tourism, you could.*
>
> *Gudrun: Yes, but the majority of their problems are homemade, over which we have no influence, on the financial or the tax system or the banks or the corrupt politics over there [...]*
>
> *Jasmin: There was this crowdfunding initiative, if every European donated a euro, then Greece would be saved four times somehow. But of course, on the one hand, this sounds a bit utopian, and on the other, not everyone can donate one euro while others can donate much more. For instance, a mother with four kids and one or more jobs cannot inform herself about the political situation, she has her own worries so to say.*
>
> *Anton: You also have the feeling that measures have been taken, that we are liable for our debts, and so you feel a bit freed from responsibility, a bit self-reliant. Anyway, they've already got so much money that I personally have nothing more to do now.*
>
> *Gudrun: I think it's difficult, because you cannot understand the situation exactly, either due to lack of information or perhaps due to lack of interest, or due to your own concerns. Also, it's not so much that I cannot donate a euro, but I wouldn't donate it, I don't want to.*
>
> *Anton: Because I also don't see the problem in Greece to be so dramatic either, even though we hear about the lack of medicine in the hospitals etc. Yet I don't think the situation is so dramatic, as in other areas, as in Africa for example, because many Greeks still own their homes and so on…*
>
> *Jasmin: I find it always difficult to say where it's worse, people can judge for themselves, but then one doesn't need to look outside Berlin because we have so many problems, be it social, cultural etc. Yet, I don't blame the people on the ground, I'm not saying that the Greek people are responsible for the crisis.*
>
> *Gudrun: Yeah right, that's why a lot of banks there were saved with German money, but of course I still don't understand how I could help [the Greeks] individually.*
>
> *Jasmin: So, it shouldn't be the task of the individual to save a country, it should be dealt with at the foreign policy level, but in some cases it's like an emergency situation, one might have to switch to other things.*
>
> *(Germany, 26-40HE)*

Reference to Greece receiving solidarity funding triggers laughter among participants rather than approval. Participants engage in a long discussion why this is the case. Greeks have received funding multiple times for a problem that is not yet solved and is seen as caused by their own irresponsibility (tax evasion, corruption). The argument that "Greece has been saved with German money" was a common repertoire in the discussions, coupled with paternalistic and familial undertones (the German paymaster in the European family). In other instances, the Greeks were portrayed as kids that should not be trusted with money, while Germans have a parenting mandate (Sascha, 41-60LE). One participant (Jasmin) critically distances herself from blaming the population for the crisis. Left-wing participants in Germany appeared relatively

sympathetic to Greek citizens putting the blame not only on political corruption but also on the (global) banking system. However, the rest appear frustrated with the issue. The "multiple and multilevel crises" environment has triggered insecurity and preoccupation with own worries as material and symbolic threats loom on the horizon even for citizens in crisis-surviving countries. A new crisis may be on the way.

6.1.2. Injustice: The mystery of bankruptcy in Greece, bailing out Greece in Germany

There was widespread awareness in Greece that although citizens played a role in the financial meltdown, the latter was due to excessive borrowing predominantly at the country level rather than citizen indebtedness. The fundamental sense of injustice was built around the idea that politicians throw citizens indiscriminately into poverty, insecurity and depression, although not all of them borrowed money irresponsibly. Participants discussed the country's dependence on money supply as political mismanagement, since it is impossible for citizens to know the specificities of macro-economic policy. Recurrent questions emerged addressing injustice regarding what they perceived as unofficial bankruptcy.

> *Manos: My opinion is that we're trying to change something which is fundamentally wrong. With small alterations the situation doesn't change, there needs to be a revolutionary change of the system. I think that we rely on a value system that has been imposed on us.*
>
> *Nikos: Essentially, is the system or are we to blame?*
>
> *Manos: Because at the moment, they (politicians) try to make us feel guilty, that it's our fault.*
>
> *Nikos: Well, I'm not sure whether it's not our fault.*
>
> *Valantis: It's the citizens' fault for the situation we are in.*
>
> *Manos: So, will you tell a new-born child tomorrow, it's your fault? Why is there huge public debt?*
>
> *Valantis: No, but maybe it is its father's fault for engaging in corruption, it's someone's fault.*
>
> *Niki: Yes, but it's also the fault of a kid that his father didn't do such a thing, but its classmate's did for example.*
>
> *Valantis: Everybody will pay the price though, this is the problem.*
>
> *Manos: So, you see there's a logical fallacy here.*
>
> *Valantis: And it doesn't comply with the rule of law. But this isn't democracy, we don't live in a democratic system, right?*
>
> *Manos: Exactly, that's why I'm saying that we need a revolutionary, fundamental change of the system.*
>
> *(Greece, 26-40LE)*

Participants address the need for a political revolution – a recurrent interpretative repertoire in the Greek discussions – because they find themselves unable to influence politics. Mobilizing against austerity in the streets and the ballots for five years (2010-2015), they see no actual change. Instead, the system appears in generalized crisis and deeply undemocratic, unable to provide solutions apart from making people poorer. Participants are aware of citizen contribution to the financial and political meltdown, that is by engaging in clientelism. There is a logical fallacy though as they point out quickly. Not all citizens and politicians engaged in corrupt behaviour. The question then is: Who did? These questions underline an important aspect in the Greek crisis, the fact that no justice has been served. Iceland was brought up as a counter-example of a country that jailed politicians and bankers involved in the crisis (26-40LE, 41-60HE). Even though citizens assume that their desperate situation is due to loans and corruption, the perpetrators of putting in debt present and future generations are still unknown. Instead, politicians accused citizens indiscriminately that "we were all in this together".

Contrary in Germany, the fundamental sense of injustice was organized around the interpretative repertoire of "bailing out Greece" – that of having played by the rules yourself, but paid repeatedly for other peoples' irresponsibility in a period of crisis. A minority of discussants highlighted the role of banks in the financial crisis, yet the majority blamed the "relaxed Greeks" and their "corrupt politicians" for bringing their problems to the EU (see Chapter 5, p. 98). Keeping a balanced budget requires sacrifices and adopting unpopular policies such as cuts in public spending. German citizens appear to understand that these sacrifices are justified by concern for the common good (German and European competitiveness). Contrary Greek citizens are portrayed as behaving in an irresponsible and selfish manner, placing life quality before long term collective goals. In the words of Igor (26-40LE, p. 96), *"if other countries have wasted money and we balanced the budget, then it's difficult to tell the German people 'Yes, by the way, we need to pay for others', because they didn't keep within budget as we did".* Participants seem to presuppose that Greek citizens knew about the irregularities with the admission criteria, the unbalanced budget or the levels of sovereign debt, which as we saw in the focus groups, was not exactly the case. They employed interchangeably the levels of country, government/politicians and citizens in blame attributions (Greece=Greek government=Greek citizens), and didn't seem to differentiate between diverse groups in society, for example rich and poor Greeks, law-abiding and corrupt citizens. Reinforcing stereotypes by over-simplifying intergroup differences within

countries was a common practice also in Greece, particularly in the refugee crisis, indicating a competitive European environment.

6.1.3. Identity: The little people vs. the markets in Greece, responsible vs. irresponsible Europeans in Germany

The extent of humanitarian crisis in Greece and the fact that austerity was imposed despite voting for a radical left party (SYRIZA) in government introduced a certain opponent, the markets and wealthy countries that were seen to be waging an "economic war" on Greek citizens. Thus, while acknowledging responsibility for the crisis, participants also employed a strong anti-capitalist and anti-austerity discourse, as shown in Chapter 5. Discussing political strategies, participants constructed collective identities like the (little) people vs. the markets/banks (multinationals), citizens of the European periphery vs. capitalists (politicians and business) of the European centre. These identities were politicized to the extent that the financial crisis was perceived as a collective problem rather than an individual wrongdoing (see Chapter 5, p. 94-95 & p. 116). Moreover, the financial crisis in Greece brought another aspect to the fore. That it is as much an economic issue as it is an indication of "Europeanness" and citizens' capacity to participate in a common union responsibly. In the words of Zacharias (61+HE), *"it's a big issue for me the fact that on the one hand we consider ourselves Europeans and on the other we don't behave accordingly".* Most discussants echoed this statement and were surprised to find out about the statistical manipulation and huge public debt. At the same time, they constructed a different Europe, that of humanism and solidarity, which was negated by current practice: the economic, cultural and political subordination of the European periphery to the centre.

Presented as "Greek particularity", most participants in Germany abstained from blaming the system – capitalism or the EU – as a whole. Rather they introduced certain distinctions between responsible Europeans that pay their dues and those irresponsible that lie and take advantage of others. Greek citizens were portrayed in general as living beyond their means, enjoying a relaxing, fun-loving lifestyle, lying and cheating, working less and retiring earlier than the Germans (see Chapter 5, p. 98). Thus, they were denied the status of "good Europeans". On the contrary, German citizens were discussed as hard working, responsible individuals who do their utmost not only for their country but also Europe. The "German paymaster in the European family" was a common repertoire. In the words of Laurenz (Activists, p. 114), "*when those who*

pay the most are also burdened with the problems of others, well at that moment [you know that] something is wrong". Although participants acknowledged their powerful position and high levels of prosperity, they also referred to groups in society that struggle financially. References to homelessness and poverty rising with the crises, parents stressing about raising kids, cuts in welfare benefits, rising rents and competition in the job market triggered sentiments of relative deprivation. "*Yes, we are doing well, but compared to past times or Scandinavian countries we lag behind*" (61+HE).

6.1.4. Agency: Survivalism & collective resistance in Greece; nobody asked about the bailouts in Germany

Participants in Greece expressed widespread pessimism and futility about the influence of the "little people" over banks and multinationals, especially among those with fewer resources (education, income). However, they left a window of opportunity open in the event that citizens unite and use their purchasing power strategically, by engaging in massive collective boycotts and civil disobedience (e.g., abstaining from paying taxes collectively) in the age of financialized capitalism. Participants shared numerous examples of personal engagement in alternative resilience networks. In many ways, ordinary citizens turned into activists out of necessity and this political capital socialized and empowered them. In some instances, even civil disobedience was proposed by participants that did not identify as particularly leftist to tackle poverty and dehumanization.

> *Ionas: With respect to neighbourhood associations and citizen initiatives, maybe now that the house auctions will begin, maybe they're also needed more for the local community and how it can react to this [situation]; let's say that they come to take the neighbour's home nearby, and I join or the neighbours next door, we go to the front and we let no prosecutor get inside, no police, nobody.*
>
> *Takis: Like we did with re-connecting the power supply*
>
> *Ionas: With electricity yes, like we did with re-connecting the power supply. So, this [action] has a locality in it, there is an acquaintance even if we don't say good morning every day like we used to. But you see the neighbour across the street, you see him hanging clothes every day, you hear that they come to take his home and you say the poor fellah, guys let's go ten people to the front [to stop the eviction]. There are also these voluntary associations engaging with such [solidarity] initiatives, but especially for us who live in the neighbourhood it's even closer [to get involved].* *(Greece, 41-60 HE)*

Due to the crisis some citizens lost their homes, or could not pay the bills anymore. As the state bailed out banks to keep the financial system alive, so did citizens help one another to survive the crisis. Resisting authorities foreclosing homes and cutting the power supply could be

considered illegal activities. However, participants present them as rational and humane reactions to an unjust situation. Discussants portray a strong local community that empathizes with the adversities of the neighbour, although the trend of individualism is also present. The motives for action are not all about smashing the system or bringing on the revolution – these motives were also present – but helping the "poor fellah". Successful experiences with civil disobedience filled participants with empowerment, and worked as a guide for future action.

Participants in Germany portrayed themselves as observers in the "financial/Greek crisis". They argued that the bailout packages were decided at the federal and European level, where German citizens seem to have limited influence. They expressed bitterness at not being asked about the MoUs. Participants suggested referenda, opinion polls or public deliberative meetings, so that politicians are in line with the public sentiment. In the event of a referendum on whether Greece should receive aid though, the most likely response would be "NO" as Jan, echoing many discussants, suggests below.

> *Norbert: [Debating further citizen inclusion in politics] And if we now voted in referenda, I think it'd be very good, although of course it also has its risks, so for example, if information is misleading and people vote on issues using their gut feeling. So this is also the problem, it should be that people actually inform themselves and then vote and decide on things, because you cannot be an expert on everything. And if you only look on the surface, this can also bring many problems. But if information is correct and people can deal with it and actually want it, I think it can also bring many advantages.*
>
> *Jan: I believe it [a referendum on Greek aid] would throw us into chaos. Because one has some kind of conviction, something like "Greece gets no more money, it's their own fault. Full stop. End. That's enough! And you cannot really see all the consequences related to this decision. Who is now exactly and how much involved in the situation, and who must pay and how much, and should Greece really lose all the money etc. Yes, it's just too superficial and too complex a matter to simply say: 'Yes, I'm against it, or No, I'm for it.' I think, this is not helpful. Because we're no experts on these matters either. For example, one simply says: 'Well, this is unfair, they get into debt and we have to pay for it, in the end they should see where they end up'. Well, I believe, this was the message in the media, more or less. And if we now voted on this question, then the majority would decide to turn our backs on them perhaps without really thinking about the consequences. I believe, this would be very problematic.*
>
> *(Germany, 18-25LE)*

Debating alternatives in political decision making, participants in Germany discussed the option of referenda on important issues. As will be shown in the democratic alternatives section, participants did not consider referenda as panacea to the crises. Some issues are too complex to be decided upon with a "yes" or "no" in the ballot box and may have unintended consequences. Here, implicit reference to the Greek referendum is made for not taking into consideration issues of responsibility for the common currency. Participants acknowledged the usefulness of *advisory*

referenda as “citizen barometers”, however, so that politicians are aware of people’s views on crucial matters. Overall, German participants did not express much agency and empowerment when discussing the financial/Greek crisis. Action at the level of institutions and by politicians such as Germany’s finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble and his famous “black zero” deficit policy were seen as adequate strategies.

6.2. The refugee crisis

6.2.1. Social construction: In search of moderate alternatives in Germany, solidarity networks and pro-refugee SYRIZA in Greece

Whereas the financial crisis was predominantly felt in Greece, it was the refugee crisis that triggered serious concerns in Germany. Overall, German participants empathized with the refugees but appeared overwhelmed by the large numbers to be received and the chaotic, disorganized state response in accommodating them. As a result, they were in search of moderate alternatives to express their dissatisfaction with Chancellor Merkel’s open refugee policy. The latter went against the more conservative approach to immigration that her party, the CDU, was promoting for years. Some participants applauded her and were inspired to assist with the matter, but most felt the need to express their dissatisfaction in an attempt to influence this “terrible decision”. Processes of polarization and radicalization were discussed with the ongoing mobilization of pro and anti-immigration actors in the movement and party arena. In Greece participants discussed refugee solidarity initiatives operating in the sea and on the land and minimized the presence of the far-right party Golden Dawn as a reaction to the shock triggered by the financial crisis. The pro-refugee response was discussed as facilitated by the mobilization of solidarity networks emerging with the financial crisis, and the election of the left-wing SYRIZA that supported a solidarity-driven European response to the issue.

Starting with Germany, participants argued for a humane yet responsible approach to the refugee crisis. The federal government was severely criticized for not rising up to expectations even though it declared emphatically that “we can do it”. Action at the level of institutions such as speeding up the asylum process, opening up the labour market to accommodate the newcomers and offering language and integration courses were suggested by a majority. Left-wing discussants argued further that the origins of the refugee crisis should be tackled by ending the war in Syria and disengaging the Bundeswehr [arms industry] from the MENA region. Attempts

to keep refugees in camps in the region (e.g., Lebanon) were also proposed "as for them to feel comfortable within a familiar cultural environment" (18-25LE, 26-40HE). In the words of Jasmin (18-25LE), "*my opinion is that the problem isn't actually in Germany, but where the people come from originally. So, you should try to keep the people in their homes, thus you should try to stop the war somehow. Because, eventually we will have a cultural problem in Germany".* Perceiving a chaotic, disorganized state response, discussants provided numerous examples of solidarity initiatives. Solidarity cinemas, solidarity kitchens, welcoming events at schools, money donations, distribution of blankets, food and clothing were but a few examples of the "welcoming culture" in the country (Funk, 2016). Indicative of the polarization on the issue, solidarity references were often coupled with anti-refugee sentiments and practices by nationalist groups (NPD, PEGIDA, HoGeSa), like destroying refugee centres or bullying volunteers (18-25 HE, 41-60 HE, 61+ LE). The tension between pro-refugee and anti-refugee discourse is presented below.

> *Alexander: My dog trainer is totally committed [to the refugee issue]. The first days when the refugees arrived, she said: It cannot be that people have to spend the night outside, this is ridiculous, and the weather was still warm. So, she went there and served tea. I don't know if it was meaningful, but people saw that someone cares. Nobody paid for it, nobody asked for it, nobody said thank you besides the people who were served. In the meantime, this [initiative] was organized through Facebook and now they are five of them. This group also collects donations and distributes them to the people who still camp outside, and they're also handing out blankets, because now it's really cold. I also find it unbelievable that adult people in Germany have to sleep on the floor outside some fucking authority, because they have to wait for their numbers [for an appointment with the services]. So, she's engaged personally and feels good about it… The only thing she sacrifices is time and maybe some money for fuel or something. I think it's great.[…]*
>
> *Ingrid: I'm also committed, but not in this area of refugees, I wouldn't do that, definitely not. But I've recently given a package of my deceased partner's clothes to my neighbour who runs a refugee home. And he wanted to take me there at some point, it was in the summer when it all started, and I said 'no thank you I'm not interested'. He told me come with me to see with your own eyes and I said no. Meanwhile, his family has changed its mind about these people, who were always very pro…*
>
> *Alexander: I hear this relative often that people, who are in direct contact with them, at some point they say it's enough.*
>
> *Ingrid: Sometimes he pours his heart out to me when we're standing at the fence of the property, saying 'sometimes I'm really sick of it, I don't want to go there anymore, the cleaners need more time than before'. I asked why is it so? He told me that they have to go there three times a day, because they behave in a very unclean manner…*
>
> *Pauline C.: Because this is how they behave in their countries.*
>
> *Ingrid: Yes, but we cannot do anything about it, they are with us now.* *(Germany, 41-60HE)*

Participants suggested that the refugee issue triggered a polarized and emotional debate in Germany, with citizens expressing both empathetic and fearful sentiments. In this excerpt we

encounter Alexander's (41-60HE) heartfelt reference to his acquaintance engaging in solidarity initiatives that welcomed refugees and assisted with basic needs and German bureaucracy. The motivation behind these practices is humanism, helping people in need, and is presented as a natural response to human suffering. This grassroots solidarity organizing was supported by volunteers and facilitated by social media. Groups in the public sector such as firefighters and the army were also mobilized to assist with practicalities like transforming unused buildings into refugee centres and building new camps. Ingrid brings a counter-example to show that solidarity practices can backfire when refugees are not urged to adapt to the host society. Despite his pro-refugee example, Alexander agrees with Ingrid that this *cultural clash* can turn citizens away from solidarity practices. This recurrent interpretative repertoire posed that "foreigners" need to integrate if they wished to stay, by speaking the language and behaving in accordance to German norms.

In Greece the refugee crisis was discussed as an international crisis triggered by oil wars in the MENA region. It affected the country predominantly due to its geographical location. Participants agreed with their counterparts in Germany about institutional, individual and collective action strategies, like stopping the war, donating and volunteering. Yet, they also problematized the lack of resources and infrastructure in the country amidst the crises, especially among right-wing participants. Novel solidarity practices were discussed, such as moving to the islands to assist the rescue teams operating in the Aegean Sea.

> *Kostas: [Referring to the pictures of political engagement presented to them] I would like to see a picture with people saving lives in the Aegean Sea at the moment. It's something very powerful, very important.*
>
> *Nikos: Yes, a picture from Lesvos [Greek island and major hot spot on the migratory route to Europe], because it's a very recent and intense moment, seeing kids drown in front of you… it had a big effect on all of us emotionally, it got us involved…*
>
> *Takis: Related to what we can do as citizens, my point is that apart from participating in politics and becoming a better citizen, you need to do this directly and actively by rejecting delegation of your responsibility and political power. Because this makes you an active citizen. There's a range of political activities I can engage with. In the refugee crisis for instance, I can start from liking a post on Facebook to going to Lesvos and help refugees.*
>
> *Ionas: So, going to Lesvos is preferable to liking a post on Facebook?*
>
> *Takis: I'm not saying it's preferable, I'm just saying that liking a post is a passive activity that doesn't engage with your self-development directly – that is, to engage with the problem at its source, whether it's in Lesvos or anywhere.*
>
> *Nikos: Yes, the more actively you engage with politics, the better for you as a citizen.*

> *Takis: Exactly, because you get a direct glimpse of reality, who are these people that come to your country to find refuge; whereas with liking a post there's no real interaction. (Greece, 41-60HE)*

The refugee crisis appears to be an intense and emotional moment for participants that got them involved. The *proximity of these tragedies*, "seeing kids drown", has activated Greek citizens, with many leaving the comfort of their apartments and social media to provide direct assistance. Participants suggest that active citizenship, engaging with a problem at its source, is key to transforming people's consciousness and agency, due to empowerment and political responsibility that comes with real unmediated interaction. In this excerpt, discussants engage in a debate about online and offline solidarity practice. Online action is presented as a relatively novel form of engagement that comes with technological innovation. Information on international politics and connectivity with activists and political groups were positively evaluated. On the other hand, surveillance, fake news, individualism and passivity (liking a post) were presented as serious disadvantages

6.2.2. Injustice: Foreigners in own country in Germany, Europe's largest hot spot in Greece

The fundamental sense of injustice in Germany referred to the idea that citizens were disproportionally burdened with the refugee crisis, becoming "foreigners in their own country". Chancellor Merkel and the mainstream parties were blamed for not offering alternatives and silencing citizens on the matter. Participants expressed willingness to assist refugees from war-torn areas and authoritarian regimes (as opposed to economic migrants). However, they suggested that a certain balance must be kept between the locals and the foreigners (see Chapter 5, p. 105). They argued that receiving 1.5 million refugees was intimidating and threatened social cohesion. Participants expressed bitterness about what they perceived as lack of European solidarity on the issue: some countries receiving large flows, while others, placing their national interests first, accepted only few or built fences to stop any people from entering (Hungary, Poland, the UK, Luxemburg in the discussions). In the words of Walter (Activists, p. 114), "*what bothers me now with the refugees is that the EU is very much ahead with solidarity [Irony]. Some say they don't want any [refugees], others say we only want Christians although it's Muslims that are coming... And now they cannot agree how to distribute the people, that's not the solidarity I have in mind when I think about Europe. And the so-called values that are always held high in Europe, which they quickly go down the drain, a heavy disappointment".*

Participants in Greece portrayed the country as the largest hot spot in Europe due to the Dublin European Regulation amidst severe financial and political crises. The EU and wealthy Europeans were held responsible for dealing with another crisis in an inhumane manner. Discussants identified with the weak and employed the underdog repertoire, that the refugee crisis emerged from the same processes of capitalism, imperialism and colonialism that brought Greece to its knees (see Chapter 5, p. 116). Powerful wealthy nations, European and global centres, were perceived as dominating poorer ones, targeting their resources (oil, gas, gold, diamonds) or using whole countries for specific purposes. Greece for example was portrayed as a filter for skilful refugees to reach their first destination countries in the North, whereas the rest remained trapped in shameful conditions. In the words of Vivi (26-40HE, p. 103), *"Greece has a very specific role in the European Union, because we receive refugees and this has to do with Europe's interests. So, the situation in the country becomes even more complicated. It's not enough that the country has a weak economy and a legacy of civil war. Basically, Greece has become a bit like the sewer of Europe".*

6.2.3. Identity: Maybe Islamophobes but not Nazis in Germany, poor but hospitable in Greece

In this polarized environment, participants in Germany made certain distinctions between "us" and "them", referring mainly to the *cultural clash* between the locals and the foreigners. The most crucial distinction participants made was between Christian/Western/rich and Muslim/ Eastern/poor refugees. For right-wing participants this cultural clash extended also to the economic sphere. They expressed resentment that funds will be allocated to foreigners instead of "our people". In the words of Pauline (41-60LE), "*and suddenly we have money, but what about money for our children? In Kaulsdorf, a school had to close down due to potential collapse, but now all of a sudden we have money*". Left-wing participants distinguished between rich and poor foreigners, referring to rich multinationals that don't pay their fair share of taxes as opposed to "fugitives" who flee their homes due to life threatening conditions. In the words of Wilma (61+LE), "*at last, someone should do something, not against the poor refugees, but against the rich refugees, these companies that work here. These refugees are more expensive than those who are coming now*". Yet, the most politicized differentiation was between Christian and Muslim refugees. The former were portrayed as moderate, secular, egalitarian, law-abiding, aspiring to democracy and European social norms, "people like us". The latter were presented as

religious, radical, authoritarian, potentially criminal or terrorist ("ISIS fighters"), threatening "our way of life". In the following excerpt participants discuss the rise of the radical right as a reaction to the refugee crisis.

> *Alexander: [Discussing further citizen inclusion in politics, and referenda in particular] I think it would be a good thing if politicians saw that what they consider in their ivory towers doesn't correspond to reality sometimes and that the population perhaps has a completely different opinion on a specific issue.*
>
> *Konrad: Like with PEGIDA, the government said, there are just a few people in Germany, a few misguided people on the extreme right.*
>
> *Alexander: Yes, they are a lot.*
>
> *Konrad: I don't count myself in, but I don't think they're just a few. And if you held a secret election now, there would come out numbers, I think, that would be very unpleasant for politicians...*
>
> *Ingrid: Yes, I believe that many PEGIDA supporters are pushed too far on the right, always on the far right, and I don't think this is correct. Because I believe that there are a lot of people, who are just overwhelmed at the moment, overwhelmed in the negative sense, by the refugee policy and the fact that they want to defend themselves somehow, and they perhaps see it as the only way to express themselves. I, for example, don't go there [PEGIDA demonstrations] out of fear somehow.*
>
> *Alexander: I also find it annoying when people who are engaged with the refugee issue hear someone expressing criticism, they don't try to convince them with arguments, but simply say, you're a Nazi.*
>
> *Konrad: Yes, they're being pushed away.*
>
> *Ingrid: Exactly, that's what I mean, you're pushed towards the extreme right.*
>
> *Alexander: Of course, and then my reaction would be, you say I'm a Nazi, but do something. It feels like the people who don't agree with us, are called out as Nazis. And I find this response too little at the moment.*
>
> *(Germany, 41-60HE)*

Participants suggest that the large presence of "unintegrated foreigners" in Germany and the threat of receiving even more has led to polarization and right-wing radicalization, because citizens cannot find alternatives among mainstream parties. Although the federal government tried to minimize their presence, participants construct a majority that appears overwhelmed, annoyed and defenceless. As Konrad (41-60HE) suggests, echoing future developments with the rise of the AfD, if there was a secret election at that moment (Fall 2015), the radical right would receive large support among the electorate. Moderate left-wing participants agreed with Chancellor Merkel that "we can do it" and urged officials to open up unused spaces for refugee accommodation. Most participants in Germany supported a more conservative approach to the refugee crisis, but distanced themselves from the *radical* right. Yet, they suggested that the collective mobilization of the PEGIDA movement and parties like the AfD have managed to bring contestation to a policy that was presented to them as TINA. A common interretative

repertoire in the two countries indicated that citizens who express criticism over the unconditional reception of refugees tend to be approached as Nazis in Germany and racists in Greece instead of discussing the matter in a thorough and rational manner.

Participants in Greece differentiated between "the hospitable people" that show solidarity with the refugees and "the insensitive Europeans" that don't share their good fortune with others (see Chapter 5, p. 106 & 109). This was also a strategy of positive differentiation from the "wealthy but insensitive Europeans" who, in their view, treated in a cruel manner Greeks and refugees alike. Interestingly and stereotypically, most participants did not differentiate between diverse groups among "those Europeans", such as citizens and politicians, progressive and conservative groups. In a situation of reduced resources and material deprivation, discrimination against "immigrants" as opposed to "refugees" was present. Othering expressions like "these people", distinctions between legal and illegal status, and references to them being a burden on welfare services and the job market were expressed (see Chapter 5, p. 103-104). Left wing participants highlighted western interference in the MENA region to argue for a solidarity-driven strategy, while right-wing discussants underlined the crisis-ridden environment in the country to justify a more moderate approach. Yet, there was a tendency to deny accusations of racism and project them onto others, mainly the northern Europeans as will be elaborated in the next section.

6.2.4. Agency: Citizens silenced in Germany, normalization of refugee solidarity in Greece

Participants in Germany proposed repeatedly that they were silenced on the matter. The spontaneous welcoming initiatives were seen as partly successful at the local level but far from an effective national response. Whereas some discussants agreed emphatically with Chancellor Merkel that "*Us Germans we are a large prosperous country and thus we can do it*" (Konrad, 41-60HE), the majority disagreed and proposed voting for conservative parties opposing open borders. Most participants distanced themselves from the PEGIDA movement and the radical right party AfD as too extreme on the right. Yet these political actors were seen as passing the message that "people had enough". Another strategy participants discussed was holding referenda about the number of people to be accommodated and the location of refugee centres in the German states (26-40HE, 41-60LE, 61+LE, see Chapter 5 p. 105). However, they expressed concerns over creating more tensions between rival camps than reducing them. They brought the example of Switzerland, where a referendum on the construction of Minarets was seen as

dividing citizens, being hijacked by radicals who wanted to express anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments.

Participants in Greece referred to moderate levels of efficacy and agency, mainly at the local level of solidarity networks. The presence of a left-wing party in government was discussed as altering the discursive opportunity structure on the issue (visibility, resonance, legitimacy), with austerity being prioritized to cultural threats as explanation for the troubles in the country (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). Pro-refugee discourse and practice was relatively normalized as the following excerpt shows.

> *Michalis: I believe that voting is important but not the most influential strategy, even though politicians want to make us believe that this is people's ultimate voice in a democratic system. Something that we do once every four years!*
>
> *Petros: Look, we always talk about the [problematic] political system in Greece. But don't forget that in Germany the first party, in 2015, is the Christian-Democrats, in the Netherlands they have the Native Dutch, in Austria they expect the extreme right, in France there's Le Pen, in Norway the same, in Eastern Europe, in Poland the same... So, I think that for Greek standards we're ok, the fact that we have this alt right that has an organizational capacity of 100 people in PanHellenic meetings in contrast with the marches of 15.000 angry dudes and daily arsons of refugee centres. In 2012 [in Greece] there was a rise [in racist violence], more than 1000 attacks in 6 months, but that's it. This has to do with the political constellation in society. There are no daily arsons of refugee centres like in Germany, where we think that everything is ok…What I mean is that for example the last 1-2 years with the refugee crisis, you see that public opinion is oriented more towards solidarity, even hypocritically, compared to 2010 and 2011, when there was a rise in racist violence. Now that SYRIZA is in power you see that people start thinking differently about some issues. Like with the refugees, whenever a group posts that we need warm clothes at this particular place, the next day you have 35-40 boxes of clean clothes. What I mean is that people are active, there was passivity, there still is, but I think we're in a better position than Europe regarding issues of consciousness. Necessarily we're in a better position I reckon, lots of myths have crumbled down [with the crisis].* *(Greece, 18-25HE)*

Petros (18-25HE) in this excerpt concludes a long discussion among the youth about the political system in Greece. Engaging in comparisons with moderate and radical right-wing parties in Europe, he argues that the presence of and support for the radical right in Greece is weaker compared to northern Europe (Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, France, Poland), because of the "political constellation in the country". Whereas 7% voted for the Golden Dawn, 27% and 36% turned to SYRIZA in the 2012 and 2015 general elections respectively. Petros suggests that it makes a difference when official governmental and media discourse does not blame refugees for the financial and political collapse in the country. SYRIZA shifted the locus of responsibility from cultural (immigration) to economic (austerity) causes for the multiple and multilevel crises. The people considered responsible for the crash were predominantly political and economic elites

in the country and abroad, not the fugitives of war and famine. This discursive framing triggered processes of identification with the weak and resonated with large segments of the population who found themselves at risk of poverty and precarity due to austerity. However, this strategy is not unproblematic either to the extent that it essentializes cultural differences and justifies discrimination and (reverse) racism towards the "northern Europeans". In addition, solidarity with refugees can emerge at the same time with a rise in nationalism in a polarized political environment. Participants tended to minimize the fact that Golden Dawn, even though fringe, was one of the most extreme nationalist formations in Europe (Ellinas, 2015).

6.3. The political crisis

6.3.1. Social construction: Revolution in Greece, reform in Germany

With centrist parties delegitimized due to corruption and irresponsible governance (clientelism) in Greece, and corruption and programmatic convergence (grand coalitions) in Germany, citizens turned both to the left and right of the political spectrum to find *alternatives*. In Greece where the main grievances related to the economy and forced poverty for large segments of the population, citizens supported *predominantly* the left in the movement and party arena that mobilized a comprehensive anti-austerity agenda. Support for the Indignant movement complemented voting for SYRIZA in the anti-austerity mobilization cycle (Karyotis & Rüdig, 2015). Contrary, in Germany where the main grievances referred to immigration and the cultural clash between locals and foreigners, citizens turned *mainly* to the right, expressing demands for relative control over the refugee issue. Participation in the PEGIDA movement went hand in hand with the rise in support for the AfD in the anti-immigration mobilization cycle in Germany (Arzheimer & Berning, 2019; Dostal, 2015). Here "mainly" and "predominantly" are of key importance because these differences are a matter of degree and not quality; the political constellation in Greece and Germany is more complex. What is observed in both cases is *polarization*, the mobilization of left-wing **and** right-wing discourses as opposed to centrist consensus ideologies. In this environment of multiple and multilevel crises, citizens' preferences may shift from the left to the right depending on the type of predominant issues and the level of politicization by movement and party actors (Roberts, 2017).

Another important observation is the *fragmentation* of party loyalties triggered by disappointment with mainstream 'cartel' parties, as well as the *radicalization* of political

strategies as a reaction to system irresponsiveness (Katz & Mair, 1995). In both countries, mobilization in the movement arena (the Indignant and PEGIDA movement) predated polarization and radicalization in the electoral arena (SYRIZA and AfD parties). Support for new parties (e.g., ANEL, Pirate Party) and transformation of existing ones (e.g., KINAL/PASOK, SPD) was observed to offer alternatives to citizen discontent. However, in Greece the crisis of legitimacy emerged earlier in 2010 and was more severe due to the country's unofficial bankruptcy. In Greece we encounter a struggle for material basic needs and the prerequisites of a democratic system. Consequently, participants' discussion about political strategies was more radical and status quo-challenging than in Germany. Germany's crisis-surviving status in the economy and Chancellor Merkel's powerful leadership up until 2015 prevented a crisis of legitimacy, with citizens engaging in moderate reformist action to express their dissatisfaction. A post-materialist political environment emerges, with citizens stressing about life quality, work-life balance, and leading a responsible life style.

With these observations in mind, at the level of institutions, participants in both countries argued for the prerequisites of living in a fair state that respects the rule of law, treats citizens equally and provides *basic social protection* and quality social services in education, healthcare, employment and housing. Participants referred repeatedly to Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Iceland and Norway in the discussions), as examples of social democracies that provide for their citizens. At the individual level, being active, lawful citizens who consume ethically and responsibly, and treat people with respect were common repertoires. It was at the collective action level that numerous examples of political strategies in the movement and party arena were discussed. I will start with Greece where the political crisis erupted first.

6.3.1.1. Mobilization in the movement arena

Anti-austerity mobilization in Greece emerged in the movement arena when both labour and conservative mainstream parties were involved in the Eurozone statistics scandal and invited the Troika (EC, ECB, IMF) in 2010 to assist with the financial crisis. This decision delegitimized both parties in people's eyes. Movement organizations were perceived as legitimate and available actors to mobilize against austerity. The Indignant movement camped symbolically in front of the parliament in Athens aiming to cancel the signed MoU and prevent politicians from ratifying a

second mid-term structural adjustment programme. The following excerpt discusses its effects on the political system.

> *Giannis: Out of all the demonstrations I remember the only massive demonstration that scared politicians was the situation with the Indignant movement. That time everyone who looked at the politicians would understand that they were all scared, all the political spectrum.*
>
> *Evaggelia: They [Indignant movement] were persistent and had duration.*
>
> *Giannis: Because they [politicians] realized that a very large part of the population wasn't represented by them. They couldn't control this large group of people, and we see now how the political landscape changed when these same politicians controlled the people again.*
>
> *Evaggelia: Exactly*
>
> *Lina: But how did they control the people?*
>
> *Giannis: They brought these powers that absorbed this indignation, and then it [the movement] took another form of expression, the power constellation changed and the influence of political parties, even though I don't know if we experience something different [from the previous pro-austerity government].*
>
> *Despoina: Yes, the Indignant movement changed the political landscape.*
>
> *Olga: I agree with Lina that demonstrations don't make a big difference, but because there are many injustices, I'd like to see this again. I've only been to a demonstration two times in my life because I don't believe in this.*
>
> *Giannis: Don't you believe that the Indignant movement changed the situation?*
>
> *Olga: We didn't see it.*
>
> *Giannis: Centrist big parties disappeared, isn't this a change in the political landscape?*
>
> *Olga: Yes, of course.*
>
> *Giannis: Of course! In my view it was an opportunity for new things to emerge.*
>
> *Eleni: And for other parties to join the parliament.*
>
> *Lina: The Indignant movement was in 2010-11, it wasn't in 2015.*
>
> *Giannis: Yes, but big changes don't happen in 5 minutes. Their views are expressed now, this ends (showing the picture with the Indignant movement), and we go to...*
>
> *Eleni: Elections* *(Greece, 41-60LE)*

The use and repetition of the word "scared" with regard to the government and 'all the political spectrum' emphasizes the strength, popularity, and novelty of the movement. According to Karyotis and Rüdig (2015) 36% of the population participated in it and 70% expressed support. Recurrently, even participants (Olga, Lina) who disagree with demonstrations as a political tool 'would like to see this again', witnessing the efficacy and empowerment of united citizens. Participants argue that the Indignant movement instituted social change from below that

was later reflected in the party arena. Although two participants express reservations about the extent of impact on the political system – not about the impact itself – they are persuaded by intense argumentation. Discussants suggested that the movement raised awareness on the crisis of representation and the responsibility deficit of 'big centrist parties' in tackling the crises effectively. This awareness raising led citizens to punish the mainstream parties that ruled Greece for 35 years and brought new actors to the fore (SYRIZA, ANEL, POTAMI, Golden Dawn). Political parties strive to represent large segments of the population to exert influence on the political system. Therefore, they cannot ignore a massive unrepresented movement or group in society. They will try to "bring these powers that can absorb this indignation" in an attempt to control the political landscape. The Indignant movement is discussed as having transformed the electoral arena from a two-party majoritarian to a multi-party coalition system.

Radicalization started on the right in Germany, which was spotted with the mobilization of the PEGIDA movement in 2015 against the unconditional reception of refugees and the so-called "Islamization of the West". Participants referred also to movement mobilization on the left, with a massive demonstration in Berlin (roughly 250.000 people) protesting the secret negotiations of the TTIP deal between the EU and the US government. Notably, apart from brief references (18-25HE, 26-40 HE, 41-60HE) – two positive about resistance to the power of finance and one negative about camps as a strategy – there was no extensive discussion of the Occupy movement or anti-austerity mobilization in Germany. Germany's close relationship to "ordoliberalism", its resilience in the financial crisis and leading status in the Eurozone, has prevented the emergence of a massive anti-austerity movement (Young, 2020). As the German focus groups were conducted right after the large anti-TTIP demonstration, participants referred repeatedly to the latter as an empowering example of "the voice of the people". The lack of transparency in the negotiations of the deal was discussed as another indication of democracy being in crisis because politicians pursue their interests, even when it is at the detriment of society. In the words of Stephanie (18-25HE): "y*ou need to explain it to the people and make sure that you don't discuss it [TTIP] behind closed doors, because it's a matter that concerns us all. It might be smarter to include society perhaps a bit more in some decisions, maybe with referenda*". The alternative of referenda on important political decisions emerges again, especially on topics that participants find themselves completely disregarded.

Helga: Of course, it's a good thing [that people protested against the TTIP]. Because public pressure creates political pressure. So, in this case there were 250,000 people in the streets, it was gigantic.

Beatrix: And even if we have this parliamentary democracy, politicians cannot go completely against the will of the people.

Walter: Such a massive crowd gives you already a good feeling that you aren't the only one who's against it, but there are still 250,000 others. In the end they said that it was 150,000 people, with such things the numbers are always downplayed. But it was so massive that Gabriel [vice chancellor at the time] had to say that he will look into the TTIP again and Lammert, the Bundestag president, also said that if they don't have the documents in time to examine them sufficiently, he will put the TTIP on ice, which is already telling [of the demonstration's efficacy].

Laurenz: I think it works the same way like with the big demonstrations in Germany against the Pershing II [missiles], the SS20 and so on. So I was there and I wanted to say 'Yes!', I was marching alongside 500,000 people in Bonn, we were twice the inhabitants of the village there. Ok Kohl didn't let public pressure change his plans, Schmidt first and then Kohl, but it has worked nevertheless and there are always side effects that you never would have thought. The same is true with TTIP, this is just the beginning…

Walter: And in Gorleben, too, if people hadn't chained themselves to the trees, Gorleben would now be full of steel barrels [with nuclear waste] rusting in front of your eyes. But then there is this big massive crowd that you can no longer ignore in politics or the media. So, I think this TTIP demonstration was a complete success, although it was relatively silenced in the media, but the next demonstration will come.

(Germany, Activists)

Doris: I don't know what happens with demonstrations, because either the politicians ignore them, or I don't know what kind of influence a demonstration really has. Sure, they make it to the news, but do politicians change anything? I mean, I'm not a member of PEGIDA or so, but there are many people that are afraid and some just overreact and shift completely to the right… but, I mean, even if these extreme people wouldn't be there, nobody would listen anyways. There are many people that react strongly and they are made fun of. And those that have good ideas about the TTIP and the like, I don't know whether the politicians really understand their demands, because they just respond to what they want…

Ana: Well, I see that demonstrations serve to politicize people and they don't necessarily need to be directed at the politicians, but at the broader context. They appear in the media and help that the topic gets big.

(Germany, 26-40LE)

Participants in Germany reflected also on the power of the people when they are united and the usefulness of protest in politics. Even though they doubted its efficacy, discussants expressed empowerment when referring to the massive anti-TTIP demonstration. The power in numbers indicated that politicians could not silence this "big crowd", as they would appear completely delegitimized. Politicians are portrayed once again as "living in their own world", detached from citizens and everyday life problems. Massive eventful demonstrations were seen as effective in indicating a *crisis of legitimacy* in politics (Della Porta, 2008; Hutter et al., 2019). Successful mobilizations were linked to other instances of (retrospectively successful) collective resistance, forming a history of "people's struggles" for social justice. Common examples

participants referred to were the anti-nuclear protests in Bonn and Gorleben in the 1970s–1980s and the Monday protests that culminated in the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Recurrent references to the environmental and peace movement in the focus groups indicate its resonance and significance in German politics (Karapin, 2010; Kriesi et al., 1995). As indicated in the excerpt, the anti-TTIP eventful demonstration went further than political consumerism and protesting the dictates of the economy. It had a strong pro-democracy message of transparency, accountability and representation in politics, at the national and European level. With the spread of social media, "politics behind closed doors" does not seem to work anymore. Citizens wish to be informed about important political decisions and their views to be taken into account. In juxtaposition, most participants expressed worries when discussing the PEGIDA mobilizations. Some discussants accepted their usefulness in attracting media attention and opening the debate on the refugee issue. Yet, the majority distanced themselves from the radical right.

6.3.1.2. Mobilization in the electoral arena

In the electoral arena in Greece, participants discussed the punishment of mainstream parties and the reward of anti-austerity challengers in the critical elections of 2012 and 2015. SYRIZA, a transformed left-wing party, moved from 4.5% in 2009 to 36.3% in 2015. It formed a coalition government with minority partner (nationalist) ANEL on an anti-austerity mandate. In July 2015, SYRIZA organized a referendum before signing the third MoU with the European partners. The turnout of the referendum was massive and citizens voted with 61.3% 'NO' to more austerity. The SYRIZA government, unable to reach an agreement with the European partners, changed the outcome of the referendum from 'NO' to 'YES' (to more austerity), accepting another bailout agreement with harsh conditions. This appears to have deeply disappointed Greek citizens as they see no genuine change whatever political means they try.

> *Ionas: Since 2009 I'd say, whether we liked it or not, politics entered everyone's life, basically the news agenda broadened: Day and night political shows, which didn't exist right? We used to watch TV series. Then the agenda changed completely. Daily there was this bombardment with politics and the economy. So we became political beings again... I think there's disappointment now, because citizens tried their last chance with SYRIZA, people who didn't want to react violently [to the crisis]. They wanted to react lawfully by the constitution, in elections, and they decided they wanted a real change, and they lost. All this disappointment has numbed them now… I don't know how it will go from now on, if Greek citizens will become political beings again or they'll remain [passive]; whether they'll return to the streets or they'll find another collective action plan, but I think this disappointment…*
>
> *Aliki: It was planned this disappointment; it was an issue that there's disappointment with SYRIZA.*

Ionas: Of course, it was planned, of course.

Aliki: Of course, because people felt indignation and they had hopes, they saw it as their last chance…

Ionas: And their hopes were denied. Exactly. Yes, it's a shock, it's not just disappointment. A whole society of active citizens is shocked as a matter of fact. Because it's the very active citizens that turn to the centre-left and the left, these are the people that participate most in politics.

Akis: There's activism on the other side too, not only on the left. Because it's activism, we just don't agree with it.

Ionas: Yes but I don't go to that extreme because it's a small fraction.

Akis: It used to be small. *(Greece, 41-60HE)*

Discussants suggest that Greek citizens wanted a real political change and tried their chance with SYRIZA, a party that openly supported and participated in anti-austerity mobilizations. In this sense, voting in elections for an outsider that systematically voiced their grievances was the last resort before engaging in lawless means and violence due to the desperate position they are in. References to violence escalating with the crises were recurrent in Greece. Participants mentioned *systemic violence* increasing with austerity (poverty, suicides, drug abuse, homelessness); *physical and psychological violence* (family abuse, angry daily encounters); *polarization and radicalization* among political groups (left and right wing) due to unresolved problems and anger/indignation mounting up in society. Participants expressed fears of civil war in the event that the crises continue. A common interpretative repertoire indicated that the election of SYRIZA and the referendum on the proposed MoU filled participants with hope as opposed to fear instigated by the crisis and austerity, even among those that did not vote for the party. Now this large segment of the population is heavily disappointed, hinting towards passivity. This hopelessness and futility is exemplified by the idea that there is a plan against "SYRIZA", which in their view represented an alternative to the status quo. The TINA repertoire poses that alternatives to austerity are paradigmatically rejected, if not punished, so that citizens not only in Greece but the rest of Europe realize that there is no alternative (see Chapter 5, p. 93-94). System irresponsiveness to citizen demands and betrayal of the parliamentary left's anti-austerity promises, led left-leaning citizens to disappointment and disengagement, while right-wing sympathizers started mobilizing again. In line with Roberts (2017), Greece appears to have entered the spiral of reactive sequences between the left and the right until politics provides descent solutions to the crises citizens face.

While in Greece citizens had already proceeded with economic voting – punishment of mainstream and reward of alternative parties – and were considering punishing also SYRIZA, citizens in Germany were engaging with the first step in a political crisis: electoral punishment of mainstream parties. Although Chancellor Merkel and the grand coalition were moderately successful in the 2013 federal elections, attitudes started changing radically in 2015. Participants suggested that it was not so much because of the aid to Greece, but due to the liberal refugee policy.

> *Armin: I talked with a friend about it recently, it really needs a big bang, otherwise nothing happens. I wish in the next election that both people's parties are punished, that they both get 15% so that they understand what's going on, otherwise it will eventually end in civil war and chaos, it cannot go on like this. I wish that they are both punished. I hope, of course, that the [radical] right doesn't get more votes, I hope not. Oh well it's still two years until the next elections, but that's my wish.*
>
> *Doris: But I think it's [elections] not enough, it needs to be more frequent, because at the moment there are many issues on which many people would like to express their opinion somehow. But well, you have to wait a few more years, bad luck.*
>
> *Armin: Yes, I'm also of the opinion that it's not enough. I was convinced of my vote two years ago, not because of the SPD, but because of Mr. Steinbrück. And I voted, and it was clear from the beginning that nothing changes, you can do nothing, you can vote, but they do whatever they want anyway and that's the problem, you're fooled every time. We need to put pressure from below. Germans are doing well. I always say that we have to wake up […]*
>
> *Doris: You have to boycott something, if you could do something related to the economy, for example people say "we don't pay any taxes". So, if we're dissatisfied with the government, we need to find the means to express it, I don't know, somewhere that hurts.*
>
> *Armin: Or simply storm the Chancellor's office and revolution. Mrs Merkel is deposed.*
>
> *Igor: Yes, you cannot go very far.*
>
> *Armin: There's this nice page: Petition.org. I signed two already. One that Mrs Merkel resigns and second that her immunity is lifted, and I already have 250,000 supporters. (Germany, 26-40LE)*

Participants in Germany express dissatisfaction with the grand coalitions and lack of political alternatives among mainstream parties. The idea that citizens are fooled in every election because politicians do what they want with their coalitions and compromises was a common interpretative repertoire. Discussants proposed electoral punishment of mainstream parties and reward of challengers, so that politicians realize that a majority opposes these policies. Yet, alternatives were also hard to find. The Greens Die Grünen/Bündnis 90, the radical left Die Linke, the Pirate Party and the radical right AfD were discussed as providing some alternative political positions, yet not very convincingly. Participants were also in search of a collective

economic strategy that would "hurt politicians", since it is the only language that they seem to understand (attack the money), such as collectively abstaining from paying taxes. The idea of referenda on important political issues in between elections, so that politicians are aware of the public sentiment, was proposed by a majority. Participants expressed fears of "civil war and chaos", indicating that processes of polarization and radicalization were taking place also in Germany. Chancellor Merkel appeared as a polarizing figure with the liberal refugee policy. Some participants applauded her ("*our Federal Mutti should win the Nobel Prize*" Boris, 61+LE), but most wanted her out. Armin in this excerpt suggests storming her office to get her out of power. After his strategy is seen as too radical, he proposes signing petitions. In either case his message is clear, "Merkel muss weg".

The financial and refugee crises, as well as the TTIP negotiations brought another political actor to the fore, namely the European Union (EU). The EU was perceived as more obscure and technocratic compared to the federal government. Participants in both countries asked for an equal, democratic and transparent union, where citizens feel substantially represented on European matters. The EU was evaluated as secondary to national politics, not because of the institution's insignificance, but due to lack of information on its function.

> *Walter: The European Parliament is a good example [of low voter turnout in elections]. So, the powers of the European Parliament were indeed strengthened in the last election. Yet electoral participation is low, even though it's something that determines so much. Half of our laws come from Europe I believe, they no longer come from the Bundestag.*
>
> *Laurenz: Berlin is only going downhill.*
>
> *Walter: I know, it makes no sense, I can't explain this. But then I thought about it for a moment. When I saw PM Tsipras [Greek PM and leader of SYRIZA] for the first time in the European Parliament, the Belgians were very excited about the Greeks when it was the Euro crisis – so I watched the European Parliament for the first time and I thought it was cool. And there's this Euro channel but I can only watch it in the morning from 6 am to 9 am, after that comes HSE Shopping Sender [participants laughing]. And it was back then with Europe and I thought that if the European Parliament wanted citizens to know what's happening, all Europeans are interested in European matters, then they could introduce such a European channel, where people can watch parliamentary debates about the debt and so on, but there's none. It's completely puzzling to me why a channel like this doesn't exist, I can only inform myself about Europe from 6 am to 9 am on the Euro channel. They can leave the parliamentary debates without commentary even, but at least I'd know what the Belgians really want and how the French are positioned towards Greece and the Eastern Europeans. I'm really interested in politics, and European politics, but there's no such channel. So, you have to introduce it somehow.* *(Germany, Activists)*

German activists in this excerpt discuss the reasons behind low voter turnout in local, national and European elections. They relate low interest in European elections to lack of

information on European matters and the proceedings of the European Parliament (see Chapter 5, p. 117-118). Most participants presented this lack of transparency as purposeful, so that politicians can pass laws and vote policies favourable to them without checks and balances from an informed European "demos". Although activists are more interested in politics than the average citizen, participants in all focus groups shared knowledge about their counterparts in other countries, which is an indication that they care. Stereotypes about other Europeans were also abundant and relied on misinformation and yellow press. Participants suggest that it would benefit Europe if there was an official channel where citizens can access factual political information about their counterparts in other member states. Walter in this excerpt refers particularly to the broadcasting of European parliamentary debates, indicating the importance of a strong, accessible and representative parliament for European democracy.

6.3.2. Injustice: Citizens oppressed in Greece and silenced in Germany

There was a strong anti-politics discourse in both countries, with politicians at the national and European level accused of irresponsiveness and corruption. Yet, there was also *awareness* of citizen responsibility for the political crisis. In Greece, the severe financial and political meltdown brought citizens to realize their own contribution to sustaining a corrupt system by voting politicians in office for personal gains at the detriment of society. Responsibility weighted particularly on politicians, however, since they set the example of what is considered right and lawful in public matters due to their increased power and status. Politicians' abuse of power and proximity to business interests were suggested as common trends in Western democracies and the EU. Although the latter was seen as less corrupt than Greek politicians, its rigid stance on austerity and disregard for democratic politics disappointed participants heavily. Eurosceptic positions did not refer so much to the dissolution of the institution, as to its transformation into a political union where member states have equal status and influence.

> *Zacharias: I think the strategic goal is to shape European citizens, not Greek citizens, European citizens, who would be aware of the European context and therefore of the global context that Europe is embedded in from a very young age. In other words, active participation in shaping European citizens for a Europe that is much more substantial and far more, let's say, fair.*
>
> *Andreas: I agree with Zacharias, this should be the goal.*
>
> *Platonas: The goal should be that all peoples, all of them, should equally participate in global politics. This way we can participate in Europe, the UN, Eurasia and so on. Yet this Europe as it is at the moment, I'm sorry but I disagree with the powerful nations of Europe imposing their interests on the powerless.*

Zacharias: But we don't disagree. We're saying the same thing. (Greece, 61+HE)

Likewise, politicians in Germany were portrayed as being too close to special interests and were accused of corruption. The multiple and multilevel crises instigated an environment of emergency with citizens seen as largely left out of the discussion. The absence of inspiring politicians was underlined. Although there were references to domestic politicians (e.g., Merkel, Schäuble), European politicians did not receive much attention, either due to lack of knowledge or interest in their work. However, it was not just the politicians blamed for the political crisis, citizens received their fair share as well. "*We have a fat belly*", participants argued. German citizens were portrayed as complacent, conforming and passive due to the level of prosperity in the country (see Chapter 5 p. 93). Individualism and the "hamster wheel" of everyday life, increased complexity with globalization and minimization of citizen influence were proposed as root causes for disengagement. In the words of Stefan (18-25LE) "*I believe that the complexity of issues increased considerably with globalisation, and that perhaps it's no longer understandable for a large part of the electorate which issues one takes a stand on, and if it's only a matter of raising or lowering pensions by one percent for example. Perhaps this is the wrong way to tell people which the real issues are and how they can decide on them politically*".

6.3.3. Identity: Progressive and reactionary alliances in Greece and Germany

Participants in Greece and Germany were in search of alternatives and a *unifying collective agency* that could bring people together against corrupt politicians and the injustices they experience. With disenchantment directed towards centrist parties, the ideological struggle takes place between *progressive and reactionary alliances* on the left and right of the political spectrum. Yet, the formation of politicized collective identities appeared particularly challenging due to multiple lines of division in society. In Greece, participants referred to the massive strikes and attempt to take the parliament in 2010, the Indignant movement in 2011, the critical elections and referendum in 2015 as moments when this collective agency materialized. Even though discussants constructed politicized collective identities of "the people united", under closer examination divergencies in political consciousness emerged, organized mainly around ideologies of class and nation. Feminism, LGTBQ+ rights and environmentalism were also present in the discussions, embedded in the left-right cleavage.

Lena: There's lack of class consciousness if you ask me. Once you realize which class you belong to and why you belong there, you can fight for better life quality for you and your children, for the future.

Nassos: May I ask something? I that my mother was rich and my father was poor, what kind of class consciousness should I aspire to?

Lena: Leave your mother and father out of this. What is you?

Nassos: I mean something else. I disagree with this methodology, I want to stress instead the lack of national consciousness, adding to individualism and the elimination of the heroic model, because we always talk about rights for the individual and then we get a fragmented society. So, when it's time to engage in collective action we end up saying "but we don't engage in collective action anymore".

Moderator: Sorry, what is the heroic model?

Nassos: Sacrificing for the common good, what's good for the nation. It's [national heroes like] Kolokotronis and Karaiskakis.

Lena: What's good for the nation depends on somebody's pocket, so what's good for the nation is that which is good for [rich businessmen like] Vardinoyannis and Latsis.

Nassos: This is nonsense. [national hero] Kolokotronis didn't fight for his pocket, nor did Karaiskakis.

Vlasis: Neither did they fight for their national consciousness, half of them didn't even know Greek, they were Arvanites.

Panos: But it [class] is very vague.

Vlasis: As vague as the nation though

George: So, there's an issue, whether in today's society we see classes in the old sense of the term or not... For example, whether a small business owner who exploits his employee but also worries about survival whether he's bourgeois, proletarian or whatever, these identities are a bit more fluid than in the past.

Nassos: That's right

George: On the other hand, national consciousness is a category that places together the poor and powerless with the big boss, whether s/he's good or bad. Thus, we cannot all fight under the same flag.

(Greece, Activists)

In this excerpt activists in Greece debate intensely the need for a political revolution and the difficulty in forming a unifying political agency that will bring citizens together in the age of individualism, consumerism and fluid identities (Bauman & Bordoni, 2014). For left-wing participants (representing PASOK, SYRIZA and radical left groups) class should be the common super-category that unites citizens: poor peoples should revolt against the rich oligarchs and superpowers. Contrary, for right-wing participants (representing New Democracy, ANEL and radical right groups) national homogeneity was prioritized: all Greeks should unite to fight the corrupt government and the EU, and re-establish a fair nation. In the focus groups both ideological discourses were present. Thus, Marxist anti-capitalist and anti-austerity discourse was often coupled with concerns about the nation. It is no coincidence that the group of activists in this excerpt discusses the Greek liberation struggle from the Ottoman Empire. There was a

certain feeling that the country was under Troika's occupation. Moreover, the use of negative stereotypes by prominent politicians triggered processes of defensive nationalism; preoccupation with "Greek history and culture" portrayed as the foundation of Europe; hostility and reverse racism towards northern Europeans, especially the Germans. The strategy of collective boycotts of foreign products that emerged recurrently in the discussions is an example of this tendency.

On the other hand, participants in Germany were searching for moderate alternatives that could represent their interests. However, due to the grand coalitions, even smaller parties (FDP, Die Linke, Die Grünen/Bündnis 90) were delegitimized in citizens' eyes. Die Linke, having reformed ideologically after the fall of communism in Germany, was still perceived as too radical on the left. Some participants supported its focus on social policy as opposed to business as usual, especially in the financial crisis. Die Grünen/Bündnis 90 party was seen as representing the interests of the new left (pro-environment, pro-feminism/LGTBQ+, pro-Europe) and those who were against the war in Syria and the oil-lobby, advocating for green policies. Thus, the Left and the Greens appeared to provide an alternative to the financial, refugee and looming environmental crisis (see Chapter 5, p. 116-117). Among new parties, the Pirate Party received some attention attempting to bridge technology, citizen representation and political decision-making but eventually collapsed. The AfD was discussed as offering alternative positions in the Greek crisis (no aid, Grexit), the refugee crisis (cap immigration, Germans first) and the political crisis (no TTIP and EU, listen to the people). Yet its populist and nationalist rhetoric, triggered fears of a radical right revival.

> *Ursula: But I think, the decline in voter turnout is also related to the fact, that one no longer feels represented. Well, from what I hear in my circle of acquaintances, and well, where I also find myself a bit… I'd prefer to vote for the CSU [that favoured a more restrictive immigration policy, but is only running for elections in Bavaria] which is close to me. The party says, okay, it cannot go on like this, at some point, it'll all blow up in our face. But, well, I would never ever vote for these right-wing socks. They're no alternative for me. How can I express my discontent? Well, if I no longer participate in elections.*
>
> *Reinhardt: There are two reasons for low voter turnout. One is complacency. That's a very big factor.*
>
> *Hugo: That's what I said, we have a big belly.*
>
> *Elias: Or the exact opposite: Dissatisfaction with the parties.*
>
> *Ursula: One no longer feels represented…*
>
> *Hugo: Well, the dissatisfied might go to the AfD, there are also dissatisfied… there are those who sit in the park with their beer bottle and rumble. They've never worked in their life, yes, they just live off social security and then they go to Penny [discounter] to get their beer bottles and grumble about politics.*

Doris: But … but … I was completely shocked at the last election, how many voted for the AfD… because I thought, they'll get less [votes].

Hugo: Well, I have to say, in the last European election, I voted for the AfD, yes, I must say that honestly. We're in West Germany where I can say that… maybe they have their problems… yes, but that's okay, I really voted for them, because of Mr. Henkel [a leading figure who left the party after its radical right turn] …and because I really like them. They're very intelligent people.

Reinhardt: Oh well, Henkel, that one…

Hugo: Yes, he's in the European Parliament. These are intelligent people. For example, they've fought against the TTIP, and the whole Greece [situation] and so on. No party has said that and, therefore, I had to vote for them, because they represent my interests. *(Germany, 61+HE)*

Participants debate the crisis of representation in German politics and the lack of political options among mainstream parties. The AfD is discussed as the party expressing dissatisfaction and resentment. Hugo (61+HE) refers to its voters in a derogatory manner, as the ones who live off the welfare state and complain non-stop about politics, but do nothing in the end (anti-politics repertoire). After Doris stressing her surprise at the party's surge in the European elections, Hugo outs himself as one of its voters. His argument is that during these multiple and multilevel crises, the AfD was the only party representing his interests. Attempting to explain his choice, he presents a leading figure in the party as intelligent, arguing that his vote is based on rational criteria. Hugo feels comfortable to express his views because he lives in Western Germany where democracy and freedom of expression prevails. This was a common interpretative repertoire among the older generation who experienced the West-East divide. This generation was most satisfied with the federal democratic system, referring to the "Nazi and GDR dictatorships" as a dark period in Germany. Discussion about nationalism reflected a change in right-wing discourse (new right, neo-conservative). The latter is not so much about the superiority of any race, but as we have seen extensively in the focus groups, it is all about the cultural clash between natives and foreigners, accompanied by traditional, conservative values on gender, religion and so on.

An ambivalent politicized collective identity emerged in the German discussions. On the one hand, participants wished to promote their national interests like citizens of any other country in a crisis situation. On the other, they were also aware of potential dangers stemming from nationalism. Federalism in Germany and the cleavage between western and eastern states rendered the formation of politicized collective identification challenging (Colvin & Taplin, 2015). Eastern Germans in particular were portrayed as being left behind in the "economic development" success story.

6.3.4. Agency: Disappointment after collective resistance in Greece, moderate and conformist citizens in Germany

Participants in both countries were in doubt about the effectiveness of political engagement, especially at the macro level. They suggested that political parties have formed cartels and politicians disregard citizens' preferences. National policies are decided in European and global centres behind closed doors at G7/G20 meetings and the NATO headquarters, and multinationals have increased their influence over political decision making. Nonetheless, moments of effective collective agency emerged when participants narrated instances where "business as usual" politics was disrupted. After mobilizing collectively and repeatedly for change, participants in Greece suggested that collective agency was expanded with the Indignant movement, voting en masse for challenger parties, and participating in the first referendum after the consolidation of democracy in 1975. Widespread preoccupation with the revolution and forming a unified agency indicates that the 2010-2015 episodes of collective insurrection have socialized and politicized large segments of the population. In the words of Platonas (61+HE), "*in Greece active citizens have taken a stance on many issues, especially during the last period with the MoUs. There are currently many political activities that are organized independently of the state. Like solidarity initiatives, solidarity clinics, markets without middle men, doctors without borders, engineers without borders. This is active society, non-institutionalized but very much active".* However, participants expressed disappointment, shock and futility at politicians' irresponsiveness to citizens' demands. There was doubt that these changes could trigger policy alterations at the European and international level. On the contrary, political change in Greece was perceived to be constrained by European and international interests. Although, citizens managed to overthrow the government several times, they were still receiving the same austerity policies.

Participants in Germany referred also to an intense political moment in the country and expressed empowerment with the massive anti-TTIP demonstration, the refugee welcoming initiatives and potential electoral punishment of mainstream parties. However, they appeared at a loss regarding alternatives. Discussants portrayed themselves as moderate people, lacking revolutionary spirit due to lessons learnt from past experiences with radical politics (national socialism and communism). The repertoire that Germans are moderate, law-abiding and conformist emerged recurrently in the discussions. In the words of Jan (18-25LE), "a*nd really*

our prosperity, we have nothing to complain about, I speak now for the whole of Germany or at least as I see it, we're doing well…Perhaps we've changed so much as a society that a real revolutionary spirit no longer lives with us". Although participants aspired to revolutionary times, they distanced themselves from the contentious past. Influence through elections and institutions was seen as the proper medium to effect politics; yet, largely ineffective due to the grand coalitions. Individual and collective local action such as volunteering and engaging with neighbourhood initiatives were positively evaluated because citizens could see the effects of their engagement. Demonstrating was successful when the stakes are high and citizens protest in large numbers. As discussed already, however, there was widespread perception that citizens, "the little people", are mostly silenced and nothing ever changes because political parties have become too similar and power has left national politics. Most participants in Germany did not perceive much influence over European matters either, although their counterparts in Greece saw them as leading the EU.

6.4. Democratic alternatives: Towards an inclusive "demos-centric" representative and participatory democracy in Greece and Germany

Participants in both countries discussed alternatives to the post-democratic crisis of representation such as referenda, public deliberative meetings and e-democracy. A minority of radical activists and citizens argued for alter-globalization and localization of politics, de-growth policies that respect the environment, multi-communitarian living and open-source technology as alternatives to capitalism, market democracy and consumerist culture. Yet, most participants in Greece and Germany proposed *correctives* to representative democracy. There was a certain preoccupation with politicians listening to citizens and acting accordingly. Participants argued that further citizen inclusion in decision-making would make citizenship more active and responsible, and as a result democracy would be strengthened. They recurrently brought the example of Switzerland as a relatively successful case, expressing concerns, nevertheless, over uninformed citizens and minority rights. In Greece participants referred commonly to the (ancient) Athenian direct democratic model, not without criticism however, over the exclusion of minorities, women (gender) and slaves (race, ethnicity), from politics. It was a historical and cultural resource that triggered discussion about alternatives.

Anna: Citizens getting more involved in decision-making, I think, it's the best thing that can happen, because I've seen something similar in Switzerland. For every important political decision in the country, they ask the citizens. I think that would help a lot.

Aggeliki: I don't know, I'm personally afraid at the moment. It may happen in Greece too eventually, but in the near future. We're going back to [political] education, you cannot go from totalitarianism to democracy overnight. It's good, I don't know how it works, I think Switzerland has a well-organized state in general. But first of all, I think citizens need to get educated and then gradually, we can move there.

Anna: I don't agree that only the educated should have a say in politics.

Vivi: This is how the system ended up, the intelligentsia and the little people. Initially, in ancient democracy it was the experts, the people who had specialized knowledge. I don't know, because politics concerns and affects everyone, so I guess everyone should have a say in the matter. Yet, it ended up being the educated, the upper classes that rule and the little people that get fooled and have no say in anything.

Anna: Essentially, in a democracy as far as I know, it's the people who decide.

Vivi: Yes, in the beginning we had a direct democratic system because the population was small.

Angeliki: Only men were allowed to participate though.

Vivi: And there were slaves too, so it's difficult to compare…

Anna: But how about deciding on important issues? Not holding a referendum over the garbage bins. For instance the citizens decided on immigration, the citizens decided on minimum wage [in Switzerland].

Nikos: Especially if the media were re-organized in such a way, so that knowledgeable and not paid people were able to provide information regarding the alternatives that we'll be voting on. (Greece, 26-40HE)

Participants propose more citizen inclusion and participation in politics as correctives to the crisis of representation and legitimacy in Greece. The etymology "demos+cracy" implies that the citizens and their preferences lie in the centre of the political process (Held, 2006). The corruption of democracy is seen as privileging the few, the upper classes to rule the many, the little people. Regarding the problem of informed political decisions, discussants propose that knowledgeable (experts), not paid (media), people should educate the public about possible alternatives they are called upon to decide. Another suggestion was the practice of electoral recall in the event that politicians engage in corruption, in an attempt to hold them accountable for their actions – something that currently seems impossible. The fair allocation of resources at the local level (participatory budgeting) inspired by the mobilization of self-organized solidarity networks, was discussed to tackle political corruption and foster engaged citizenship. Participants did not idealize "the power of the people" either. They underlined existing inequalities in access to political information and education that may hinder citizens from making the right decisions. They further argued that the majority is not always right.

Likewise, discussing democratic alternatives in Germany, participants referred mainly to supplements to the political system so that it becomes more responsive to and representative of citizens' preferences. Referenda in Germany on local matters are fairly common compared to Greece that lacks these instruments, thus it was a topic that triggered debate.

> *Jasmin: So, politicians need a long party career first to get somehow to the top and for example it may be already exhausting for them to engage with issues at the local level… But yes, you have the feeling that the people who are now in government, they don't want to change or improve something [substantially]. They implement only what needs to be done, the bare minimum, they don't have a revolutionary drive.*
>
> *Gudrun: Yes, in principle [politics] it's about nepotism, not about ability or other criteria… Now, referenda would give people more influence over politics, people would have the feeling that they can actively shape things. And I think that if the electoral thresholds were lowered [a party currently needs 5% to enter the German parliament], politicians would be a bit more careful with certain decisions, because they would have to consider that some things may be overturned eventually.*
>
> *Anton: I think that with some questions there's no "Yes" or "No" answer, some questions cannot be simply answered like that. Thus, you have to consider seriously if it's possible to organize referenda on all issues.*
>
> *Jasmin: Yes but referenda don't have to stay the same either, with a "Yes" or "No" answer, but there can be completely new possibilities. There can be four scenarios on which people vote.*
>
> *Anton: But then the citizen must also be informed. If you read how citizens really think, in comments and so on, how one-sided, how polarizing, then…*
>
> *M: On which issues should a referendum be held?*
>
> *Leopold: On local political issues. Well something like the Tempelhof that we mentioned earlier and things like that. That's actually a positive development. So, people can really vote on things that affect them directly and not on some kind of abstract systemic concept, which may be difficult to understand. But definitely on local political issues that affect people directly.*
>
> *Jens: On everything, I'd say they should organize referenda on all political issues (Germany, 26-40HE)*

As shown in previous excerpts, the introduction of frequent referenda on political issues emerged recurrently in Germany in an attempt to make politicians more attentive and responsive to citizens' concerns. Participants suggest that referenda will render citizens more responsible and politically conscious because they will have to take a stand on societal matters. Politicians would also become more considerate of citizens' grievances because they would have to take their views into account when making political decisions. As a result, citizens' political power in society will be strengthened. Participants approved and supported local/state referenda, since they have adequate knowledge at this level. The Tempelhof and Waterworks referenda were discussed as relatively successful and empowering examples. Moreover, participants proposed advisory referenda on focal political issues as "barometers of public opinion", so that politicians are aware

of citizens' views on important matters. More options could be provided than the polarizing 'yes'/'no' dilemma and experts could inform citizens on the political options they are called upon to decide. Referenda were not discussed as panacea to the political crisis however. Lack of expert knowledge, concerns over minorities, yes/no dilemmas being too simplistic, and authoritarian potentials of direct democratic instruments triggered serious considerations. Participants proposed lower electoral thresholds for parties to enter the parliament so that a plurality of political views is expressed and citizens' vote for alternative parties won't be wasted. The youth offered modern suggestions to increase interest and participation in politics, such as expansion of e-democracy and further use of technology to lower the costs of engagement, like with social media (leFloid) and Youtube channels. All in all, the importance of resources (income education) and time in particular was underlined for political engagement in both cases: time to get informed, to strategize, mobilize and organize with others, to think critically and engage in political projects at different levels of the polity. This conceptualization requires a novel approach to citizenship – from the citizen as consumer of political programs to the citizen as active agent (Haug, 2009).

6.5. Discussion

The chapter presented the inductive analysis of citizen discourse about the availability, novelty and efficacy of political strategies in the Greek and German crises. The analysis focused on the main interpretative repertoires about the problems participants deemed important; the mobilizing actors in the party and movement arena seen as addressing injustice; and evaluations of agency and opportunity for action in the two cases. In a period where citizens were excluded in many ways from the process of crisis management (Hindmoor & McConnel, 2015), the project allowed them to express their views and investigated whether their discursive practices were in line with elites or challenged moderately/radically the political establishment.

Critical juncture literature suggests that citizen political engagement differs in times of crisis compared to prosperous times. Crises render politics more plastic and social change more tangible from a political opportunity perspective, because they signify that existing institutional arrangements no longer work (Collier & Munck, 207). Participants in the two countries seem to agree that consensus centrist politics does not represent them anymore. The financial, refugee and political crises appear to problematize key aspects of the globalized model, such as financialized

capitalism, open borders and technocratic governance. Challengers from the left and the right were gaining ground over mainstream parties (Hutter & Kriesi, 2019a). Whereas in prosperous times majoritarian governments were supported, in crisis times fragmentation of party loyalties is observed. A plurality of parties and movements entered the political arena, triggering power shifts from previous to new dominant coalitions. Polarization of political attitudes and radicalization of political strategies was discussed to address the crisis of post-democratic representation and system irresponsiveness to citizen mobilization. Progressive and reactionary alliances along the left – right and libertarian – authoritarian cleavage, made their presence noticed, with Europe adding a new transnational dimension to political conflict in the two countries.

In the electoral arena, according to economic voting literature (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2007; Hernandez & Kriesi, 2016) incumbents that performed poorly just before or during the crises were punished in both countries. In Greece where the crises emerged earlier (2010) and their magnitude was more severe than in Germany, citizens punished severely mainstream parties that ruled Greece for 35 years (PASOK and New Democracy). They rewarded anti-austerity alternatives on the left (SYRIZA) and the right (ANEL, Golden Dawn), and were considering punishing SYRIZA after its U-turn on the EU/austerity referendum (which they did in the 2019 general elections). In Germany, citizens moderately rewarded the grand coalition between the CDU and SPD in the 2013 federal elections for keeping the financial crisis at bay. However, in 2015 participants were already contemplating punishing mainstream parties and rewarding alternatives on the right (AfD) and the left (The Greens, Die Linke). The 2017 federal elections, echoing our focus group participants, saw the radical right AfD and the Greens increasing their representatives in the Bundestag.

[Figure A6.1 about here] [Figure A6.2 about here]

In the movement arena, according to the political process framework (Kriesi, 2014; McAdam et al., 2001), the main politicized grievances, the dominant mobilizing actors, and focal opportunities and threats in the political context differ in the two cases. Figures A6.1 and A6.2 summarize the big descriptive picture in Greek and German politics. In Greece the economic axis is more pronounced than the cultural axis and material needs highly underlined (Gunther, 2005). The financial crisis is perceived as a process of continuous pauperization of the population by and

large. Greece, a country in the European periphery, has not achieved the level of industrialization, modernization and post-materialism that is encountered in Germany. The latter appears to be the post-material powerhouse of the European core (Young, 2020). German participants expressed concerns over life quality, and competing with other powerful players such as France and the U.S. to keep their dominant position in the global economy. Economic grievances were discussed but were not as politicized as cultural threats at the time. Capitalism, as a system of exploitation producing inequality, was problematized more thoroughly in Greece. Participants generally agreed that German citizens lacked a certain amount of suffering to get out of their comfort zone, to revolt – things seem to be working for them.

Germany was hit predominantly by another crisis, the refugee crisis. The latter triggered threats to life quality, social security and the welfare state, and a cultural clash between the so-called "secular Christian Germans" and "religious Muslim foreigners". The refugee crisis appears to build on previous migration flows in the 1970s–1980s and populations arriving with the dissolution of the USSR and the Reunification process in the 1990s (Street & Hansen, 2015). Being the largest country in Europe with diverse federal states and an active divide between western and eastern regions (and to a lesser extent between northern and southern states), issues of social homogeneity and security were prioritized (Newman, 2010). In Greece on the other hand, there was no extensive discussion about cultural clash or Islamophobia. Grievances were rooted once again on material issues, like for example "will people be able to find employment in this country? Will people have food on their table?". This doesn't mean that cultural issues were considered insignificant, but they were not as prioritized as material issues at the time. The left-wing government's official discourse placed also greater importance on austerity compared to cultural threats (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014).

Therefore, in terms of the political process model, we observe that a "certain amount of suffering" is required for people to mobilize. Moreover, citizens need allies, mobilizing actors in the movement and party arena to voice those grievances, and opportunities/threats in the political environment. Support for the Indignant movement was coupled with voting for SYRIZA in the anti-austerity mobilization cycle (2010-2015) in Greece, as did participation in the PEGIDA movement and support for the AfD in the anti-immigration mobilization cycle in 2015 till present time in Germany (Arzheimer & Berning, 2019; Karyotis & Rüdig, 2015). Participants discussed

also the mobilization of right-wing actors in Greece and left/green actors in Germany, but their presence was indicated secondary. The MoUs, the presence of the Troika, and the arrival of refugees in Europe triggered threats in society with citizens mobilizing in the streets and the ballots to voice their concerns. The unofficial state collapse in Greece and supervision by a "foreign institution", the Troika, triggered a "nothing to lose strategy", intense resistance and preoccupation with the revolution. Contrary, Germany's powerful position in the EU provoked a more conservative "much to lose strategy" and strong consideration among the citizenry about retaining their good performance in times of crisis.

Yet the crises in Greece and Germany appear to be part of the same process, that of globalization and European integration (Hooghe & Marks, 2018; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019b). With these processes deepening, the current crises brought centre stage the issue of democratic representation and legitimacy in a system of multilevel governance (Crum & Merlo, 2020; Della Porta, 2013). Post-democracy and corruption, system irresponsiveness to citizen grievances, and transference of policy making from national governments to the EU and NATO has triggered political disenchantment, a rise in Eurosceptic sentiments, populist tendencies and a return to national politics (De Vries, 2018b; Kriesi & Pappas, 2015). At the same time, participants in both countries discussed an increase in political engagement. They referred to the formation of new civic institutions, social movements and political parties to tackle the crises. They were further contemplating on the quality of national and European democracy and the use of participatory and direct democratic tools at the local, national and European level in an attempt to influence politics. In Greece citizen engagement and novelty of political strategies has been significant. With participation in massive general strikes, attempts to occupy the parliament, formation of the Indignant movement and engagement in alternative forms of resilience, citizens *triggered* four snap general elections in five years punishing mainstream parties and supporting alternatives. Likewise, in Germany participants discussed a period of intense mobilization, with pro-refugee solidarity networks and welcoming initiatives, PEGIDA mobilizations, the massive anti-TTIP demonstration, punishment of mainstream parties and search for alternatives.

[Table A6.1 about here] [Table A6.2 about here]

Detailed discourse analysis of citizens' political strategies per crisis, with a focus on repertoires of injustice, identity, agency and alternatives, highlighted plausible mechanisms for

the discussed patterns in Greek and German politics (see Tables A6.1 & A6.2). With regard to injustice and blame attributions, scholars argue that the politics of crises are politics of blame avoidance (Boin & t'Hart, 2001; Roose et al., 2017). However, politicians and citizens alike may take responsibility for the crisis situation out of fairness, honesty and necessity in identifying the root causes of the problems so as to provide effective solutions. Participants in both countries identified domestic politicians, the EU, corrupt and complacent citizens as responsible for the crises they perceive. Awareness of dysfunctional institutional arrangements (post-democracy, corruption) and citizens' contribution to the problem (clientelism, passivity) was rather present when crises were felt directly – responsibility was acknowledged. Blame avoidance and stereotyping emerged when the crises under discussion affected participants indirectly and were perceived at the European level (responsible and fair Germans in the financial crisis; poor but hospitable Greeks in the refugee crisis).

Identity refers to the political actors citizens perceive as available and legitimate to address grievances and tackle the crises (Gamson, 1992). As shown in the chapter, mainstream centrist parties were seen as part of the problem (neoliberal convergence, post-democracy, corruption) and delegitimized due to perceived crisis mismanagement in both countries. A plurality of left and right-wing political actors emerged. In Greece participants' discourse referred to old and new left-wing (PASOK, the Communist Party, SYRIZA) and right-wing actors (New Democracy ANEL, Golden Dawn), ideologies such as class and nation, material bread and butter issues, strikes, protests and solidarity networks. Participants in Germany discussed old and new right-wing (CDU/CSU, AfD, FDP) and left-wing actors (SPD, Die Grünen/Bündnis 90, Die Linke), ideologies such as religion and culture, and post-material issues like environmentalism, ethical consumption, individual responsibility and life-style politics. Politicization of issues and mobilization of actors may change over time as new crises emerge (from financial to refugee to environmental to covid-19 pandemic crisis) (Roberts, 2017). It would thus be simplistic to refer only to rightist tendencies in Germany and leftist tendencies in Greece. Discourse about class/ inequality and nation/religion, plus new issues such as gender/environment and the locus of political power (participatory, direct, demos-centric vs. representative, technocratic, elitist) in a globalized world were present in both countries.

Agency addresses citizens' evaluations of events, organizations and institutions that facilitated political engagement and social change. Participants in both countries were rather sceptical about the influence of "the little people" in complex multilevel polities and the presence of multinationals blurring the lines between nations, markets and politics. Yet, they shared numerous examples of strategies that introduced new and altered existing institutions as an outcome of their collective rather than individual mobilization. The emergence of grassroots solidarity networks and new/transformed political parties addressing the crisis of representation are relevant examples (Della Porta et al., 2017; Kousis, 2017). Participants in Greece appeared more agentic than their counterparts in Germany. They created new opportunities for social change with sustained political participation in the movement and party arena. On the other hand, participants in Germany discussed engagement, but also hesitation and passivity. Affected by the crises at a later stage (2015), they were still evaluating their severity, level of emergency, and elites' management capacity. Prosperity in the country and downward comparisons with southern Europeans gave them a sense that things may not be going well, but in other countries things were going terribly.

National and European elites employed the TINA doctrine in their crisis management strategy (Castells, 2017; Hindmoor & McConnel, 2015). Participants in Greece and Germany challenged this doctrine by narrating their engagement in alternative social movements and political parties. Social economy, self-organized solidarity networks, multi-communitarian living, e-democracy (technology and democracy), participatory and direct democracy (referenda, informative public meetings with experts, participatory budgeting) were among their suggestions. The latter focused on correctives to representative democracy and empowerment of citizen voice rather than system replacement. The severity of crises, socio-political legacy, structural position in the world economy (underdog vs. powerhouse), and politicians' management capacity, shaped citizens' political strategies and level of rupture with the status quo. Therefore, more radical alternatives were discussed in Greece and more moderate repertoires in Germany. The latest rise of "populist" left- and right-wing actors, in both countries and Europe, could be seen as a reaction first to the transference of political power to supra-national and international levels ("the invisible world that governs"); and second to the technocratic transformation of democracy, where citizens demands and grievances are disregarded as "populist" or short-sighted in the public debate.

7. Discussion and conclusions

This last section discusses the utility of the analytical framework in light of the results. The discussion chapter addresses points of comparison and contrast between the Greek and German cases and provides plausible explanations for their similarities and differences. It further outlines the limitations of the project and proposes areas for future work. Finally, the concluding chapter (epilogue) addresses the key research questions and discusses current political developments in Greece and Germany amidst broader socio-political transformations.

7.1. Societal construction of the Greek and German crises

The project aimed to investigate the societal construction of the crises in Greece and Germany, two countries that have been on the spotlight since their onset in Europe in 2010 (Roose et al., 2017; Sommer et al., 2016). The country selection highlights power inequalities between the north and the south of Europe and examines whether these influence citizens' crisis perceptions and their political responses to these problem-areas. In addition, the heads of states in the two cases have been involved in rather confrontational communication, circulating simplistic stereotypes about responsible and worthy Europeans and those lacking these qualities (Kutter, 2014; Sternberg et al., 2018). The project attempted a dialogical, solidarity-driven approach to Europe's crises highlighting complexity by examining the so-called weakest (Greece) and strongest case (Germany), so as to find points of comparison and contrast, of agreement and disagreement, of allegiance and division between the two publics. The aim of the project was to investigate whether and how Greek and German citizens talk to and past each other about the crises they experience and the political strategies to tackle those problems.

Instead of taking "the crises" as a given by relying on a deductive theoretical conceptualization, the project interrogated the processes of crisis construction in the two countries through the discourse of those most commonly missing in the literature, citizens themselves (Stanley, 2014). Furthermore, the project mapped the action repertoire to tackle the crises, and the extent of agency, subtlety, radicalism, and alternatives generated from below. The project employed mixed methods in order to combine quantitative, representative survey research about generalizable political patterns in the two cases with qualitative in-depth analysis of citizen discourse about explanatory mechanisms behind these processes (Woolley, 2009). The project attempted to bridge the micro and macro levels of structures and processes, with greater focus

brought into citizen discourse about their crisis experiences behind the commonly cited statistics. In an era of TINA doctrines and states of exemption justified by the emergency that crises supposedly pose, the project allowed citizens to express themselves about the things they deem important and examined the legitimation process of political elites and their management strategies (Hindmoor & McConnell, 2015; Stanley, 2014).

To accomplish these aims I developed a novel grounded theoretical framework for the social construction of crises and political strategies from below, synthesizing literature on (see Table 7.1): political talk (Gamson, 1992; Perrin, 2006; White, 2011); discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Stråth & Wodak, 2009) ; critical junctures (Collier & Munck, 2017; Della Porta, 2015; Roberts, 2015); economic voting (Hernandez & Kriesi, 2016; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2007); political process (political and discursive opportunity structure) (Kriesi, 2014; Koopmans & Statham, 1999; McAdam et al., 2001); and intergroup psychology (Tajfel, 1982; Reese & Lauenstein, 2014). The goal was to explain not only citizens' crisis perceptions and political strategies in the party and movement arenas, but to examine the relationship between the two publics and with Europe as a whole.

Table 7.1. Theoretical synthesis for the analysis of crisis politics from below

Analytical framework	Contribution
Case Selection	Holistic dialogical approach: comparison of strongest and weakest case, examination of power inequalities in Europe and how they affect crisis perceptions and political strategies.
Political talk	Novel grounded theoretical framework for the analysis of crisis constructions and political strategies. Systematic analysis of citizen discourse on current crises still a hiatus in the literature.
Critical junctures	Revision of macro-level analytical framework developed from the crises in L. America, & application to the European context at the micro level of analysis.
Economic voting	Test assumptions of economic voting by employing two cases with diverse degrees of legitimacy crisis and status in the EU (debtor-creditor), establishing connections between party and movement politics.

Political process	Revision of the role of grievances, mobilization, and opportunity, in times of crisis, addition of alternatives to the model. Development of process model of polarization and radicalization.
Intergroup psychology	Test assumptions of intergroup competition and solidarity by employing real life competing groups (material, symbolic, political), examination of multilevel identities in Europe.

By the time I embarked on this project in 2015, the Greeks had participated in massive anti-austerity mobilizations already for five years, culminating in the election of a radical left anti-austerity party in government (SYRIZA) (Karyotis & Gerodimos, 2015). In juxtaposition, the Germans had rewarded once again Chancellor Merkel and the moderate grand coalition between the mainstream parties CDU and SPD, while supporting also the new radical right party AfD (Weisskircher & Hutter, 2020). An intriguing question emerged as to why Greek citizens turned increasingly to the left, whereas German citizens predominantly to the right at the same moment in time amidst the crises in Europe (Roberts, 2017). An intuitive answer was that Greek and German citizens did not perceive the crises in the same way, and thus, they engaged in divergent political strategies to cope with these problem-areas. Furthermore, their structural position in Europe is diametrically different – with Germany leading the EU and Greece approached as the weakest link in the European chain (Hall, 2018).

Scholars seem to disagree on the type of crises under discussion. Kriesi and his team (2014; 2015; 2019) examine the Great Recession. Della Porta and colleagues (2015; 2017; 2018) refer to the crisis of late capitalism/neoliberalism. Hooghe and Marks (2018) examine the crisis of European integration. Bauman (2014) and Castells (2017) propose a state of multiple and multilevel crises taking place. The majority of these studies examine objective crisis indicators such as GDP per capita, debt ratio, number of asylum applications, electoral volatility; and rely on elite and media framing of the crises (Murray-Leach et al., 2014). Contrary, this project focuses on citizens' subjective experiences and meaning-making processes when talking crisis politics. Crises generate deep ideological divides and discursive battles over the most adequate framing of the origins and the most appropriate exit strategies (Coleman, 2013; Hay, 1996). Since crises contain both objective and subjective dimensions, as all social phenomena due to human reflexivity, citizens may agree on their emergence, but disagree visibly on diagnostic and

prognostic interpretations. Thus, a basic assumption of this study is that in order to understand and explain citizens' political strategies (prognostic interpretations), we first ought to investigate how these publics experience and describe the crises in their own terms (diagnostic interpretations). The better the fit between diagnostic and prognostic interpretations, the greater the resonance of crisis constructions with citizens' lived realities.

Therefore, a first group of research questions addressed specific discursive processes behind the societal construction of crises – namely, social construction, discursive performance and subject positioning (see Chapter 2). Firstly, the project examined how citizens define the crises in their own terms: the issues around which these emerge, whether they are one or multiple, similar or different. Secondly, the project interrogated the discursive performance of these crisis constructions: the processes of blame attribution, the extent of responsibility acknowledgment, and the level of compliance with dominant elite explanations. Thirdly, the project investigated the relationship between the two publics and the subject-positioning patterns in these crisis constructions: the politics of solidarity and competition between Greek and German citizens, the level of stereotyping in their discourse, and the perception of Europe and its institutions.

Survey data and in-depth focus group analysis pointed towards the same direction (see Chapter 4 and 5). Drawing on the focus groups (2015), I inductively categorized the crises as financial, refugee, and political. Although participants referred to all three as multiple and multilevel, their predominance and severity differed in each case as shown in Chapter 5. In Greece the dominant issue was the complete financial (unofficial bankruptcy, -25% GDP) and political meltdown (corruption, clientelism) in the country; and the presence of the Troika dictating policies from afar. The refugee crisis added further severity to a sense of generalized crisis. In Germany the emergency situation was triggered predominantly by the refugee crisis, the decision to receive 1.5 million refugees, secondarily by the financial/Greek crisis (as participants referred to it); but crucially by the lack of political alternatives among the mainstream "people's parties" CDU and SPD and their partners (grand coalitions). Although examined separately for scientific clarity, the crises were perceived as multiple and overlapping, extending to the European and international level. Yet, the national and local level was indeed underlined, as it is the sphere that citizens interact with one another and are most familiar with.

Survey data (2017) indicated that these same issues triggered serious concerns among the Greeks and the Germans (see Chapter 4). In Greece the top-three most important issues in society were austerity-related – unemployment, poverty, taxation – while in Germany they were immigration-related, namely immigration, terrorism and social security. Trust in political institutions, particularly politicians and political parties, and satisfaction with democracy were rated extremely low in Greece, and surprisingly, low also in Germany. Specific democratic evaluations indicated serious deficits in basic liberal democratic functions, such as competitive elections, representation of diverse interests in society, and the rule of law. At the same time, participants in both countries requested more from existing democracies, supporting further social, participatory and direct democratic elements in line with the focus groups.

A first unexpected finding was that during the exact same period, the crises in Greece and Germany were triggered by different issues, namely the economy and immigration. However, the post-democratic crisis of representation was narrated in very similar ways. Another unexpected finding was that Germany was also facing a serious political crisis, although scholars tend to approach it as a crisis-surviving case in Europe (Hutter & Kriesi, 2019; Kriesi & Pappas, 2015). To go one step further, it is due to the underlying political crisis that material (austerity) and symbolic (immigration) threats were perceived as crises per se instead of serious problems to be tackled. As the project shows, citizens perceive a generalized crisis when democratic politics cannot provide solutions to emerging problems for the majority of the population and represent their interests in the public sphere over a critical period of time.

As a result of the differential politicization of issues, the Greeks employed interpretative repertoires on “austerity”, “neoliberal punishment” and “capitalist crashes”; while the Germans problematized interpretative repertoires on “Islam”, “cultural clash”, “religious and political radicalization” (see Chapter 5). Participants in Greece constructed the financial crisis as a neoliberal scheme by superpowers debt-colonizing poorer countries after experience with austerity in Africa and L. America. In contrast, participants in Germany would introduce the “Greek particularity” argument to refer to an almost idiosyncratic type of corruption and clientelism in southern European countries. On the other hand, the Germans would construct the refugee crisis as a humanitarian crisis that nonetheless triggered a sense of “foreign invasion”

among the citizenry. The Greeks would refer to a humanitarian crisis as well, yet triggered by illegitimate oil-wars in the MENA region, identifying with the weak.

Surprisingly, when discussing the political crisis of representation in their countries and Europe, Greek and German participants were echoing each other, describing very similar problems. They introduced interpretative repertoires on "post-democracy", "puppets of the economy" and "money-oriented politics", to narrate the growing collaboration among politicians, special interests and the media, at the expense of the citizenry. They argued that citizen power and influence, having left state politics, was visibly minimized. Important political decisions are taken in European and global centres of finance and governance. Although the Greeks and the Germans identified with Europe as a political (democracy) and moral union (peace), they criticized the EU for transitioning towards a "lobbyist association" that amplified existing democratic deficits. In short, participants argued that democracy at the national and European level is in crisis and particularly the functions of representation, accountability, responsiveness, and transparency, as shown in Chapter 5.

The political crisis in Greece, being more severe due to pre-existing problems with corruption and clientelism, the unofficial bankruptcy in 2010 and presence of the Troika dictating austerity from afar, was described as a crisis of representation and legitimacy. German participants referred mainly to a crisis of representation. The political crisis in Germany emerged later with citizens in 2015 still contemplating its severity. The country's surviving status in the financial crisis has prevented a crisis of legitimacy at that point in time. Should the post-democratic crisis of representation and responsiveness continue, however, this may change as participants suggested in the focus groups. I refer to a crisis of responsiveness in the case of Germany because politicians did not take citizens' views into account when handling the financial and refugee crises (Engler et al., 2019). In the case of Greece, it is also a crisis of responsibility, since politicians' non-responsive strategies were perceived as ineffective in dealing with the problems at their source (Karyotis & Gerodimos, 2015). Consequently, the crises were perceived as multiple, multilevel, and never-ending.

But why do Greek and German participants construct the financial and refugee crises in such contrasting ways, yet describe the post-democratic crisis of representation at the national and European level in so similar terms? There is a basic difference in the Greek and German

crises. Whereas the former refers to threats to survival and is perceived as forced pauperization of the population, the latter involves threats to life quality and is portrayed as cultural clash between the locals and the foreigners (hierarchy of needs, Maslow, 1943; modernization and post-materialism, Inglehart, 1997). A basic assumption of modernization theories is that citizens bond together in societies in order to increase their chances of safety and survival. When these basic necessities are threatened citizens may survive, but they will persist in a state of traumatic anxiety (Maslow, 1943). It is no coincidence that it is the Greeks who introduce discursive themes of life and death, and refer extensively to increasing incidents of violence and suicides. In the event that these basic necessities are satisfied, citizens turn their attention to more complex needs such as life quality, culture, self-development and self-actualization. Again, it is no coincidence that it is the Germans who introduce a certain preoccupation with life quality, work-life balance, and post-materialist, liberal values. When the struggle for survival is pacified, political conflict may shift to the cultural domain and the clash of lifestyles (Inglehart, 1997). This finding is supported by research indicating that the economic/class cleavage is traditionally more pronounced in Greece, compared to the cultural/religious cleavage in Germany (Bornschier, 2010; Gunther, 2005).

Who was blamed for the severe material and symbolic threats? Participants blamed corrupt politicians and complacent citizens in both countries. In Greece, participants underlined the politics of corruption and clientelism that led to political degeneration (Lyrintzis, 2005). A widespread sense of injustice emerged because citizens have been deprived of crucial information on the financial and political collapse in the country. The presence of the Troika dictating austerity from afar and turning a blind eye to people's suffering (foreign occupation, economic war), emerged as a differentiating factor in the two countries. In Germany, participants blamed the politics of consensus and grand coalitions that deprived them of viable political alternatives in the party arena. Corruption and the growing collaboration between politicians and business interests were identified as main causes. Political scandals and the neoliberal reforms introduced by Chancellor Schröder and the Green-Left coalition in 2002-2005 delegitimized a left-wing anti-austerity discourse in the financial crisis (Saalfeld & Schoen, 2015).

This brings us to the common political crisis in the two countries. Whereas politicians used to be the intermediaries between the citizens and the state (and currently the markets and big tech), due to the post-democratic crisis of representation, citizens do not know where to turn to in

order to voice their grievances and promote their interests (Hay, 2007; Mair, 2013). My findings resonate with Bauman's argument (2014), that these multiple and multilevel crises pose a political dilemma between moving towards global governance (power without politics) and (re)turning to the nation-state (politics without power) to tackle those issues. As shown in Chapter 5, the financial and refugee crises triggered disenchantment with consensus third-way politics, globalization, and European TINA policies. Third-way politics enabled the depoliticization of societal issues and paved the way for the "neoliberal convergence" of mainstream labour and conservative parties in economic policy, immigration, democracy and Europe (Hobolt & Tilley, 2016). My findings indicate that the vast numbers of their supporters appear visibly disappointed, since they can no longer discern meaningful programmatic differences between the centre-left and the centre-right. As a result, they turn to more ideologically distinct left and right-wing actors in the party and movement arena to voice their grievances and represent their interests.

7.2. Societal construction of political strategies in the Greek and German crises

Having outlined the diverse processes of issue politicization in the Greek and German crises, it is no surprise that citizens engaged in varying political strategies to tackle these problem-areas. Yet, a certain convergence was also expected due to the common crisis of representation at the national and European level. Crises signify major episodes of institutional innovation, since they indicate that existing institutional arrangements no longer work and new paradigms are needed (Collier and Munck, 2017). As such, crises can generate radical social transformations at the micro (citizens), meso (organizations) and macro (institutions) levels of social interaction, establishing enduring legacies and producing alterations to path dependent politics (Della Porta, 2015; Kriesi, 2014; Roberts, 2015). Social change can emerge top-down via elites and political institutions, but also bottom-up through citizen mobilization and engagement. My findings show that since status quo politics no longer work, crises trigger polarization – the vacation of the moderate centre and consensus on the previous socio-political paradigm – with challengers emerging on the left and the right promoting alternatives to the problematic situation.

For years, resource mobilization and the political process framework suggested that it is resources and opportunities rather than grievances and threats that foster political engagement (Kriesi, 2004; McAdam et al., 2001). Yet in crisis times, my project suggests, political

engagement is triggered by the intensity and severity of crises; mounting grievances (recession, poverty, immigration, minimization of citizen power); disenchantment with mainstream political actors (labour and conservative parties); and threatening contingencies in the socio-political environment (MoUs, long summer of migration, EU TINA policies) (Della Porta, 2015; Roberts, 2017). The comparison between a post-materialist and crisis-hit case was employed to test these assumptions. The second set of research questions examined citizens' selection of political strategies and their discourse about grievances (injustice), mobilization (identity), opportunity (agency) and alternatives (see Chapter 3). The analysis examined the targets of injustice and responsibility attributions; the actors in movement and party politics citizens identified with in promoting contestation; opportunities and threats in the socio-political context facilitating and obstructing citizen action; and plausible alternatives to the post-democratic crisis of representation.

Once again, survey and focus group analysis pointed towards the same direction (see Chapter 4 and 6). In contrast to mainstream theories of political participation (post-materialism, resource mobilization) and according to critical juncture literature, the Greeks appear to engage in politics more than the Germans in an attempt to change their desperate situation (more grievances and threats, less resources and opportunities). As shown in Chapter 4, more than half of Greek respondents in our sample reported engaging in movement and party politics: the massive strikes before signing the first MoU in 2010, the anti-austerity Indignant movement in 2011, electoral punishment of mainstream parties and reward of challengers in the general (2012, 2015) and European (2014) elections, and the referendum on EU/austerity in 2015. Common strategies among the Germans aimed at addressing particular issues instead of the political system as a whole such as the popular anti-TTIP demonstration, economic voting in state, federal (2013, 2017) and European (2014) elections, the refugee welcoming initiatives, the anti-immigration PEGIDA marches, the Tempelhof and Waterworks referenda.

Vote intentions in our sample and actual election results are in line with the focus groups. Mainstream centre-left and centre-right parties are losing ground, while challengers on the left and the right are winning votes in both countries. Electoral dealignment and realignment was more restructuring in Greece than Germany. The Greeks punished severely mainstream parties and rewarded challengers mainly on the left – with austerity, corruption and democratic renewal

being the main issues – in the critical elections of 2012, 2014 (European) and 2015 (Altiparmakis, 2019). A plurality of alternative parties emerged after the collapse of the centre-left PASOK and centre-right New Democracy. In Germany, focus group participants were contemplating economic voting strategies, which they put into effect in the 2014 European elections and the state and federal elections in 2017, rewarding mainly right-wing challengers that mobilized against immigration in the refugee crisis (Bremer & Schulte-Cloos, 2019). Apart from the critical emergence of the radical right party AfD and the transformation of existing parties to respond to citizen discontent (e.g., SPD, Die Grünen), the German party system appears relatively stable. However, the political constellation in the two countries is more complex as indicated in the focus groups (see Chapter 6). The Greeks supported secondarily right-wing actors, as the Germans promoted left and green parties. What is observed in both cases is polarization of political attitudes due to party convergence; and radicalization of political strategies due to TINA irresponsiveness to citizens' grievances (see Figure 7.1).

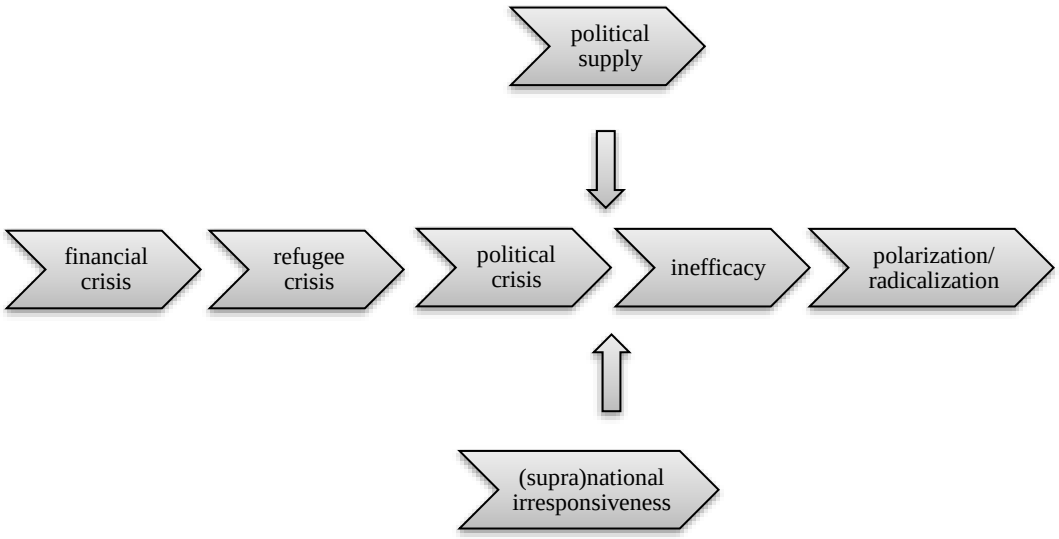


Figure 7.1. Process model of polarization and radicalization in the Greek and German crises.

Citizens in both countries engaged further in self-organized solidarity networks and voluntary associations to assist people in need due to lack of state provision. Greek participants reported higher engagement in these initiatives, possibly out of necessity (survival), after the financial and political meltdown in the country. In Greece these citizen-led institutions emerged

from the anti-austerity movement in the financial crisis and extended their activities in the refugee crisis (Kousis, 2017). In Germany the solidarity welcoming initiatives were formed in the refugee crisis and were facilitated by a rich network of humanitarian and activist organizations (Lahusen, Kousis, & Zschache et al., 2018). As regards democratic alternatives, participants rejected the TINA doctrine and supported further citizen inclusion in politics (see Chapter 4 and 6). They suggested that politicians should find ways to listen to citizens' views on important issues via advisory referenda, public deliberative meetings, opinion polls and e-democracy, and make use of experts and independent media to inform the public about political alternatives. They repeatedly brought the example of Scandinavian social democracies as societies that respect the citizen and provide a basic safety net for people to flourish above material needs and survivalism. Switzerland was admired for giving citizens the opportunity to express their opinion on important political issues with referenda. Electoral recall was proposed by a majority in an attempt to hold politicians accountable for broken electoral promises and corruption. Thus, the Greeks and the Germans requested more from existing democracies, not less.

Contrary to widespread "populism" arguments based on analysis of party manifestos and deductive party categorizations (Kriesi & Pappas, 2015), participants did not construct any pure will of "the people". Democratic legacy seems to trigger diverse conceptualizations in the two cases: the city-states direct democratic model shaped by a culture of resistance in Greece vis-à-vis the federal decentralized representative model shaped by a culture of moderation in Germany (Colvin & Taplin, 2015; Featherstone & Sotiropoulos, 2020). In both countries, participants acknowledged that there are crucial differences in economic, social, and political interests among diverse groups in society. They discussed eventful moments where a politicized collective agency was formed more or less spontaneously, such as the Indignant movement and the anti-TTIP demonstration, due to massive citizen turnout and support (power in numbers). However, the formation of politicized collective identities that represented citizens by and large was discussed as particularly challenging. Most discussants conceded that referenda and public deliberative meetings should have an advisory role, expressing concerns over minority rights. Further integration of first- and second-generation migrants in the polity was debated.

All in all, survey and discourse analysis indicated that the differential politicization of grievances (austerity and corruption vs. immigration and party convergence), diverse

identification with political actors in the party and movement arena (austerity vs. immigration challengers), and varying political and discursive opportunity structure (debtor vs. creditor) in the two cases conditioned citizens' political responses to the crises they perceive. Instead of an "either or" logic, the project suggests that the processes of grievance politicization, supply mobilization, and opportunity/threat appropriation, as well as the mechanisms of injustice attribution, identity politicization, and agency formation – are activated for citizen mobilization to occur (see Chapter 3 and 6). Yet, in crisis times, even more crucial seems to be citizens' political awareness (cognitive liberation) and active participation in these processes, which in turn enacts further opportunities for political change from below, as my project shows.

Focus group analysis indicated that awareness of grievances among the citizenry emerged earlier compared to the institutional actors expected to represent citizens' interests. Massive and enduring engagement in social movements, eventful demonstrations and solidarity networks to address those grievances, uncovered the crisis of representation and legitimacy and brought contestation to issues that were presented to citizens as TINA. It paved the way for the transformation of existing and the emergence of new political actors in the electoral and movement arena that aimed at voicing citizen discontent. In some cases, it even destabilized the political system as a whole, triggering snap elections, resulting in hung parliaments, and fostering collaborations among parties that were previously considered unthinkable. As such, increased citizen mobilization in party and movement politics enacted further opportunities for engagement and generated political alternatives from below.

With respect to competing theories regarding the rise of left-wing anti-capitalist (Castells, 2012; Della Porta, 2015; 2018) and right-wing authoritarian challengers (Hutter & Kriesi, 2019a; Norris & Inglehart, 2019), my project, investigating political strategies in the movement *and* party arena, in two countries that are differentially positioned and impacted by Europe's crises, indicates that both tendencies are present. In Germany, the post-materialist powerhouse of Europe, citizen concerns centred around threats to life-quality and powerful position in the world economy. Capitalism and globalization, more or less, works for Germany (Hall, 2018; Hübner, 2015). As a result, participants in their majority suggested moderate strategies to render the political system more responsive, and protested its post-democratic transformation mainly through elections, political consumerism, volunteering and eventful demonstrations (much to lose

strategy) (Weisskircher & Hutter, 2020). In Greece, citizens challenged radically the national and European establishment in the streets and the ballots. They attempted a political revolution, as the proposed economic and political model (austerity, globalization) signifies widespread poverty for the population by and large (nothing to lose strategy) (Garyfallou, 2020). My analysis illustrates the mobilization of left-wing libertarian and right-wing authoritarian alliances, with the economic axis (class/inequality) being more pronounced in Greece and the cultural axis (nation/religion) more prominent in Germany. Positions on Europe and globalization add a new dimension to political conflict problematizing the locus of power and citizen influence in an increasingly globalized political environment (Hooghe & Marks, 2018; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019b).

7.3. The Greeks, the Germans and Europe amidst the crises

The Greeks, the Germans, and Europe were present in each and every of these crises, although the focus groups did not address these issues or the relationship between the two publics explicitly (see Chapter 5 and 6). With regards to their relationship, participants reproduced the political conflict that emerged at the elite level, approaching each other as opponents rather than allies in Europe, especially in the financial and refugee crises (see Table 7.2).

Table 7.2. How Greek and German citizens talk about crisis politics in Europe

Different crises	**Crisis of representation and radicalization of strategies**	**Rise in nationalisms and stereotypes**
Austerity and politics	Anti-austerity challengers	Resistance of small nation against superpowers
Immigration and politics	Anti-immigrant challengers	Responsibility of powerful nation to keep Europe together

➡ DIVIDED EUROPE

The Greeks would identify with other nationals in the global South (the Spaniards, Argentinians, Syrians) “oppressed by super powers”, and notably with the Icelanders due to their alternative crisis management strategy (punishment of politicians and bankers). The Germans identified with other “responsible northern Europeans” (the Dutch, French, Swedes) and positioned themselves with leading world powers such as France and America. In the political crisis, especially at the European level, there was a tendency to approach each other as members

of the same family that suffered from undemocratic policies decided on higher levels. Critical repertoires that challenged the stereotypes of "lazy Greeks" and "authoritarian Germans" emerged in the discussions when participants were able to take responsibility for the unjust situation, acknowledge mutual interdependence and approach issues from an internationalist perspective. Their emergence – even as minority discourse, in the sense that they were the exception and not the rule – indicates that dominant discourses were challenged and citizens do not passively consume information.

Europe was politicized in the discussions. Participants tended to differentiate between the categories of "Europe" as a political (democracy, solidarity) and moral (peace, unity) project, and "the EU" as a technocratic economic institution that promoted business interests at the expense of European citizens. In line with research on European integration, the lack of meaningful representation in the European Parliament and the democratic deficits of powerful non-majoritarian institutions (i.e., Council and Commission) were underlined (Crum & Merlo, 2020; Della Porta, 2013). Participants expressed also pro-European sentiments and desire to move towards a meaningful political union characterized by similar economic and social policies, substantial democracy and solidarity. Echoing research on multiple and multilevel identities, although participants identified predominantly with their local region and nation state, inclusion in a super-ordinate category and the sense of being part of a larger community triggered positive associations (Fligstein e al., 2012; Reese & Lauenstein, 2014).

Yet, the disproportional influence of powerful member states (Germany, France) in the EU was perceived as dominating by the Greeks. Likewise, the Germans disapproved of their "great responsibility in Europapolitik" that affected visibly their domestic politics. Which of the two tendencies will prevail, the politics of division and competition or the politics of alliances and solidarity, remains to be seen. As Collier and Munck (2017) suggest, critical junctures are long-term processes involving intense power struggles. It will take years before we have a clear view of the crisis outcomes for politics and society. As the project shows, this process will depend heavily on the interaction among the emergence of crises, elites' management capacity, citizen engagement and transnational interdependence.

7.4. Intergroup variation

The project indicated limited variation in perceptions of crises and evaluations of political strategies among diverse age and education focus groups. The excerpts in the analysis were selected from all age groups and education levels, ordinary citizens and activists alike. Noteworthy variation emerged at the ideological (left – right, libertarian – authoritarian, integration – demarcation) and country level (Greek underdog vs. German superpower). These groups debated opposing interpretative repertoires and provided diverse justifications for their political choices. Limited variation may also be the outcome of the analytical method, namely the examination of interpretative repertoires that were generally accepted and reproduced *across* focus groups (Stanley, 2016; White, 2011). In this section, I will elaborate on plausible sources of variation, referring to biographical availability (age) (McAdam, 1986) and inequalities in participation (education) (Verba et al., 1995) as topics for future research. Scholars tend to agree that politics is a resource-intensive activity that requires time, knowledge, employment, embeddedness in organizations, and interaction with aggrieved others to flourish (Stoker & Hay, 2017).

With regard to biographical availability, younger participants in both countries (18-25) were preoccupied with social change, globalization and technological innovation. They expressed more positive repertoires towards European and global interconnectedness compared to older groups, but lacked experience with extensive engagement and complex political processes. The 26-40 and 41-60 groups – that is productive and reproductive age – seemed to be most affected by the crises. With the need for a secure job to sustain their families and rising responsibilities the aspiration to overthrow the system and change society radically appeared more nuanced and reformist. The elderly groups (61+), although seemingly disconnected from current political and technological challenges, showed extended political experience and brought a reflexive stance to historical and political legacies.

Education in this study was also employed as a proxy for income/class. With respect to inequalities in participation, lower educated participants appeared more politically dissatisfied and less efficacious. They seemed to employ the “anti-politics” repertoire more often than higher educated participants, as they feel they are invited to participate only in rigged elections, while experiencing the most negative consequences of the economy and immigration. They show lack

of political interest, not because they don't care, but due to the fact that the costs are higher for them (time, money, knowledge). Instead, they focus on family, work, and making a living (the Hamster wheel of everyday life). However, they still have opinions about politics and how things should be governed – they are not apathetic.

These observations indicate directions for future research. It would be intriguing to investigate whether the youth is indeed more positive than older groups about global and European interconnectedness, even amidst Europe's crises, and the role of social media in their evaluations. Another area for future research could examine whether the "anti-politics" repertoire is more widely employed among lower income and education groups, the reasons behind it and possible repercussions for political engagement. Furthermore, discourse analysis of the main interpretative repertoires about crises and political strategies does not do justice to narratives of intersectionality and multiple lines of oppression that reflect the unique experiences of individuals and social groups (Stanley, 2016). This study focused mainly on the nationals of these countries, who notably referred to the relative exclusion of first and second-generation migrants from politics. It would be beneficial to examine also the views of those most regularly excluded from politics, if we wish to not replicate power inequalities in our research: the migrants and refugees, women and LGTBQ+ groups, the poor and homeless, the disabled, and especially the intersection along multiple lines of marginalization (Butler, 2020).

7.5. Limitations and directions for future research

Having outlined the main findings, I will refer to limitations of the research project and suggest avenues for future work. In particular, the project draws on survey research and qualitative focus group analysis in Greece and Germany to generate scientific insights into crisis politics from below in Europe. The POLPART focus groups were conducted in the capitals of the selected countries. Globalization and European integration underline the issue of scale in politics and the cleavage between urban metropolises and rural areas (Bauman & Bordoni, 2014). Future research should examine whether important differences in crisis perceptions and evaluations of political strategies emerge between these areas. Furthermore, although the two cases were selected for their heuristic value, conflicting relationship, and power asymmetry in the EU, they are not representative of all southern and northern European countries. An important finding was the unique effect of political culture and democratic legacy on crisis perceptions and political

strategies in diverse societies. As such, more research is needed on the commonalities and differences among different European regions (northern, southern, eastern).

Moving to the research method, mixed methods allowed for a fuller picture to emerge that would not be possible by employing either approach alone (Denzin, 2010). Broad political patterns in the two countries were bridged with citizens' justifications and explanatory mechanisms behind these processes, testing the commonality and applicability of a limited number of focus groups. Discourse analysis highlighted important limitations in survey research, such as the generality of pre-formulated questions and answer categories unable to capture multiple and multilevel crises or eventful political strategies from below. The project focused increasingly on citizen discourse about these processes and not on causal relationships between abstract variables. Yet, for future work, the preliminary statistical analysis could provide the basis for more complex examination of intergroup variation in crisis perceptions and political strategies, that could be supplemented by focus group analysis on these comparisons.

The psycho-sociological, constructivist approach to discourse analysis introduced in the project examined the main interpretative repertoires about crises and political strategies emerging across focus groups when participants debated crisis politics. The aim of analysis was to reconstruct the general sentiment that facilitated the specific crisis interpretations in the two cases (Stanley, 2014). The project reported also on critical repertoires and "silenced" minority discourse when these appeared (see Chapter 5, discursive performance). Yet, critical repertoires and minority discourse were not the main focus of the project. Future research should examine the structure and function of these repertoires, and the reasons behind receiving a minority status. Could it be that they did not resonate with citizen experience at large or were perceived as too radical or extreme? What is the role of the media in the designation of public discourses as minority or dominant?

Following systematic procedures in data collection and analysis is crucial for comparative research. The cross-national POLPART project allowed for identical standardized procedures in survey and focus group research (see Saunders & Klandermans, 2020). Yet again, surveys measure self-reported attitudes and behaviour intensions, not actual political engagement. On the other hand, focus groups generated rich data and intriguing theoretical and empirical insights, but they are far from "natural" discussions (Duchesne et al, 2013; Stanley, 2014). Their public

deliberative format and moderator's presence may hinder citizens from disclosing honest feelings and opinions. For instance, participants seem to avoid expressing extreme views (racism as taboo) and reporting engagement on illegal activities (e.g., occupation of governmental buildings). Future research may incorporate participant observation, experimental procedures, individual and group interviews on sensitive issues and with citizens that hold extreme views as to capture the full spectrum of political behaviour.

Despite political heterogeneity being common among households and workspaces, research indicates that citizens tend to discuss politics with like-minded others (Bennet et al, 2001). Placing together left-wing, right-wing, and centrist discussants, who were politically involved in varying degrees, generated a plurality of repertoires on the topics of interest. The level of political argumentation was noteworthy among all age and education groups, as well as the extent of popular wisdom and political awareness, in line with previous studies (Gamson, 1992; White, 2011). However, in-depth discussions with people holding contrasting views are far from natural. They resemble public deliberation, with a non-directive moderator taking the back seat while ensuring that all participants have equal opportunity to express themselves on the topics of interest (Fishkin, 1991; Habermas, 1996). It would be relevant to compare the quality of argumentation in politically homogeneous vs. heterogeneous groups – a comparison that may generate important insights for the quality of our democracies.

Chapter 8. Epilogue

This concluding chapter provides direct answers to the key research questions and discusses scientific and societal implications for theory and practice. The current research project indicated complexity in citizens' perceptions of crises and selected political strategies in Greece and Germany. Whereas literature at the macro level approaches crises as de facto structures, my research allowed a more nuanced picture to emerge, focusing on citizens' meaning-making processes and coping mechanisms. The project showed that different threats, multiple and multilevel, initiated a sense of crisis in the two cases. However, it was the political crisis that was discussed as most important. Moreover, while the publics in the two cases supported political actors of opposing ideological orientations at the time, a closer examination indicated that the processes of polarization and radicalization in the two cases were common. Politics may shift to the left or the right depending on the type and severity of crises, politicians' management capacity, emerging opportunities and threats at different levels of the polity, and last but not least citizen mobilization and engagement.

This project provides a supply-side critique of post-democratic politics from below. For years scholars reflected on the quality of our democracies and whether we are facing a "real" crisis or citizens have become increasingly critical (Hay, 2007; Norris, 2011). My study shows that we have reached a point in time where we cannot avoid the realization that our politicians could do a better job in representing citizen interests and communicating with transparency and clarity the complexity of current political arrangements. Even in conspiracy theorizing we ought to explain why citizens engage with alternative theories about their politicians lying to them. Could it be because they are on the losing side every time despite the government's ideological orientation, while the political and business class appears to be making gains even amidst the crises? This project suggests that it is time to take citizen critique seriously, otherwise TINA doctrines may lead to grim authoritarian prospects.

It has been six years since the focus groups and four years since the surveys were conducted. Is the analytical framework and research findings presented in this project still relevant for Greek, German, and European politics? With the Covid-19 pandemic and looming environmental crisis it seems that crisis politics is here to stay. Undeniably, these existential threats will trigger more tensions in the spheres of the economy, immigration, and politics. The

cleavages that these crises will trigger, the politicization of issues, the availability of political actors in movement and party politics, and contextual influences at the national and international environment will co-determine citizens' political strategies to tackle these problem areas. Here, I will briefly discuss current political developments in Greece and Germany, and position the project within broader international challenges.

In the 2019 Greek elections, citizens turned to the previously dominant centre-right party New Democracy, punishing the left-wing SYRIZA after disenchantment with denied anti-austerity promises and in the midst of rising geopolitical tensions with Turkey (refugee crisis, gas and oil extraction in the Mediterranean). New Democracy, in line with right-wing discourse, shifted the political debate from austerity to immigration. Refugees are portrayed once again as a burden on a crisis-ridden society. Despite disappointing its radical electorate, SYRIZA moved from the margins to the mainstream, replacing the old dominant centre-left PASOK and introducing new politics in the electoral arena (pro-lgtbq+, pro-environment, pro-social Europe) (Hutter, Kriesi, & Vidal, 2018). A new radical left party with transnational European orientation "MeRA25/ DiEM25" emerged in its place. The far-right party Golden Dawn dissolved amidst criminal investigations and a new moderate nationalist party Greek Solution entered politics. In light of the unresolved financial and refugee crises and with new threats on the horizon, the political system is in a process of transformation. Novel and transformed political actors enter and exit the party and movement arena, in an attempt to represent mounting citizen discontent. The financial issue remains crucial, and the predominance of the left-right economic cleavage seems stable in Greek politics, but coalition governments are more likely to replace majoritarian two-partyism in times of crisis.

In the 2017 federal elections, Germany witnessed the eventual rise of the AfD as main opposition, climbing on the second and third place in many state parliaments and appearing as the main challenger in eastern parts of the country (e.g., Thuringia, Saxony, Brandenburg). The dominant centre-right CDU adopted a harder line on immigration in order to reclaim dissatisfied voters from the radical right. The liberal mainstream parties CDU and SPD, the free-market FDP, the Greens Die Grünen and the radical left Die Linke have engaged in new alliances in an attempt to deter any coalitions with the AfD. Yet, the country seems to be facing another period of right-wing radicalization with reported rise in anti-Semitism and anti-immigrant sentiment culminating

in the murder of the CDU politician Walter Lübcke – a proponent of Chancellor Merkel's liberal refugee policy. In line with the polarization thesis and the new left legacy in Germany (Kriesi et al., 1995; Rüdig, 2012), the Greens appear to be also on the rise. Will the Covid-19 pandemic and imminent environmental crisis trigger a move towards the Greens and the Left, a return to the liberal centre or the conservative, nationalist right? It will largely depend on the new alliances and viable political alternatives that will be put up for discussion. Majoritarian governments seem unlikely, and a new coalition between the CDU and the Greens is discussed after Chancellor Merkel steps down in 2021.

All in all, we have entered a period of intense economic, cultural, political and technological transformations as the world becomes increasingly interconnected and digitalized (Butler, 2020; Mbembe, 2019). While globalization was traditionally associated with the expansion of capitalism and western liberal values, the "centre of the world" is shifting towards the East (China, India). The fourth industrial revolution, increasing automation, artificial intelligence (AI), big tech and the spread of the internet and social media facilitate global interconnectedness without minimizing economic and social inequalities nonetheless (Beramendi et al., 2015). Consequently, as everyday reality and politics become increasingly complex and interdependent, we also notice resistance to these trends from citizens, politicians, social movements, business and the media.

The multiple and multilevel crises currently erupting around the globe are part of the struggle between the old world that is dying and the new world that is not fully born yet, to paraphrase Gramsci's interregnum quote. Likewise, in this project I showed the emerging struggle between old politics, born out of the Westphalian nation-state and the Industrial revolution, and the new politics of global interdependence and Post-industrial AI revolution. Present debates over the Green New Deal and experiments with the Universal Basic Income, but also authoritarianism, xenophobia and racism are on the table. As Bauman (2014) insightfully argues, the dilemma between politics without power (nation-state) and power without politics (globalization) is not an easy or straightforward one, and the outcome will depend on the interaction between multiple factors at the micro, meso, and macro levels in society. Take for instance the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. Like with the financial and refugee crises, these problem-areas surpass the nation-state and require transnational cooperation to be effectively tackled.

However, as political power and decision-making moves higher to international governance institutions, citizens emerge increasingly powerless and dissatisfied with political outcomes, while democracy becomes a euphemism (Ruling the void, Mair, 2013).

In line with previous research on democratic deficits and political disenchantment (Crouch, 2004; Della Porta, 2013; Hay, 2007; Mair, 2013; Stoker, 2006), this project shows that when citizens are left out of the discussion, cynicism, populism, authoritarianism and even conspiracy theorizing are on the rise. Until recently, politicians approached citizens like kids that don't understand the complexity of issues. Contrary, participants in this project suggested that politicians should find ways to communicate the complexity of issues at stake in transparent ways and engage people in meaningful political processes. They argued for independent (social) media that can hold politicians and business tycoons accountable beyond partisan and economic interests. Electoral recall of corrupt officials was suggested by a majority. Advisory referenda, public deliberative meetings, and use of e-democracy to inform and engage citizens were proposed to improve representative democracy and tackle political cynicism. In short, citizens in the two cases asked for more substantial inclusion in politics, not less.

In the European context, references to "Greek and German particularities" do not promote transnational solidarity, but foster competition and enmity, as this project indicates. For instance, OECD data have repeatedly shown that Greek citizens are among the most hard-working Europeans (world population review 2020), while the German media talk about the "lazy Greeks". Likewise, the significant presence of German rescue groups in the Mediterranean (e.g., Jugend Rettet and the Iuventa crew) and the noteworthy refugee-solidarity stories of activists like Pia Klemp and Carola Rackete (infomigrants, 2019) are silenced in the Greek media, promoting a stereotypical image of the "authoritarian Germans". Surprisingly, the two publics were talking to each other when discussing the crisis of democracy in their societies and Europe. Should politicians highlight their interdependence, not only in the political but also in the financial and refugee crisis, Greek and German citizens could approach one another as allies in the same family rather than opponents promoting antagonistic interests. With more crises on the way, transnational solidarity and cooperation, not only in Europe but across regions, appears to be the most challenging project for the years to come.

References

Adler-Nissen, R. (2017). Are we 'Nazi Germans' or 'Lazy Greeks'? Negotiating international hierarchies in the Euro crisis. In A. Zarakol (Ed.), *Hierarchies in world politics* (p. 1989–2218). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Altiparmakis, A. (2019). Greece–Punctuated equilibrium: The restructuring of Greek politics. In S. Hutter, & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *European party politics in times of crisis* (p. 95-117). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Angouri, J., & Wodak, R. (2014). They became big in the shadow of the crisis: The Greek success story and the rise of the far right. *Discourse & Society, 25*(4), 540–565.

Arapoglou, V., & Gounis, K. (2015). Poverty and homelessness in Athens: Governance and the rise of an emergency model of social crisis management. *GreeSE Paper No.90*, Hellenic Observatory, LSE.

Armingeon, K., & Guthmann, K. (2014). Democracy in crisis? The declining support for national democracy in European countries, 2007–2011. *European Journal of Political Research*, *53*(3), 423-442.

Arzheimer, K., & Berning, C. C. (2019). How the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and their voters veered to the radical right, 2013–2017. *Electoral Studies, 60*, 0261-3794.

Aslanidis, P., & Marantzidis, N. (2016). The impact of the Greek Indignados on Greek politics. *Southeastern Europe*, *40*(2), 125-157.

Baka, A., & Garyfallou, A. (2011). Collective identity and empowerment in the December 2008 protests in Greece: A socio-psychological approach'. *Journal of Critical Studies in Business and Society, 2*(1), 30-50.

Barber, B. R. (1984). *Strong democracy*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Bartolini, S., & Mair, P. (1990). *Identity, competition, and electoral availability: The stabilization of European electorates, 1885–1985*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bauman, Z., & Bordoni, C. (2014). *State of crisis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bengtsson, Å., & Christensen, H. (2014). Ideals and actions: Do citizens' patterns of political participation correspond to their conceptions of democracy?. *Government and Opposition, 51*(2), 1-27.

Beramendi, P., Häusermann, S., Kitschelt, H., & Kriesi, H. (Eds.) (2015). *The politics of advanced capitalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Berg-Schlosser, D., & Rytlewski, R. (Eds.) (1993). *Political culture in Germany*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. A. (2000). Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology, 26*, 611-639.

Bennett, S. E., Flickinger, R. S., & Rhine, S. L. (2000). Political talk over here, over there, over time. *British Journal of Political Science, 30*, 99-119.

Bickes, H., Otten, T., & Weymann, L. C. (2014). The financial crisis in the German and English press: Metaphorical structures in the media coverage on Greece, Spain and Italy. *Discourse & Society, 25*(4), 424–445.

Billig, M. (1987). *Arguing and thinking: A rhetorical approach to social psychology.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Billig, M., Condor, S., Edwards, D., Gane, M., Middleton, D., & Radley, A. R. (1988). *Ideological dilemmas: A social psychology of everyday thinking.* London: Sage.

Boin, A., & t'Hart, P. (2001). Between crisis and normalcy: The long shadow of post-crisis politics. In U. Rosenthal, R. A. Boin, & L. K. Comfort (Eds.), *Managing crises. Threats, dilemmas, opportunities* (p.28-46). Springfield, Ill: Charles C Thomas.

Bornschier, S. (2010). The new cultural divide and the two-dimensional political space in Western Europe. *West European Politics, 33*(3), 419–444.

Bourdieu, P. (1989). Social space and symbolic power. *Sociological Theory, 7*(1), 14-25.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.

Bremer, B., & Schulte-Cloos, J. (2019). The restructuring of British and German party politics in times of crisis. In S. Hutter, & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *European party politics in times of crisis* (p. 281-301). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Brewer, M. B. (1999). The psychology of prejudice: Ingroup love and outgroup hate?. *Journal of Social Issues, 55*, 429-444.

Brubaker, R., & Cooper, F. (2000). Beyond identity. *Theory and Society, 29*(1), 1–47.

Buechler, S. M. (2013). Strain and breakdown theories. In D. A. Snow, D. Della Porta, B. Klandermans, & D. McAdam (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell encyclopaedia of social and political movements.* New York: Wiley-Blackwell.

Bulmer, S., & Paterson, W. E. (2010). Germany and the European Union: From 'tamed power' to normalized power?, *International Affairs, 86*(5), 1051–1073.

Bulmer, S., & Paterson, W. E. (2013). Germany as the EU's reluctant hegemon? Of economic strength and political constraints. *Journal of European Public Policy, 20*(10), 1387-1405.

Butler, J. (2020). *The force of non-violence: An ethico-political bind*. New York: Verso.

Castells, M. (2012). *Networks of outrage and hope*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Castells, M. (Ed.) (2017). *Europe's crises*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage.

Christou, A. (2018). The "wretched of Europe": Greece and the cultural politics of inequality. *Humanity & Society*, *42*(1), 102-127.

Cinalli, M., & Giugni, M. (2016). Collective responses to the economic crisis in the public domain: Myth or reality?. *Politics and Policy, 44*, 427-446.

Coleman, S. (2013). How to make a drama out of a crisis. *Political Studies Review, 11,* 328-335.

Collier, D., & Munck, G. L. (2017). Building blocks and methodological challenges: A framework for studying critical junctures. *Qualitative and Multi-Method Research, 15*, 2-9.

Colvin, S., & Taplin, M. (Eds.) (2015). *The Routledge handbook of German politics & culture*. UK: Routledge.

Costa-Lobo, M., & Lewis-Beck, M. S. (2012). The integration hypothesis: How the European Union shapes economic voting. *Journal of Electoral Studies, 31(3),* 522-528.

Crawley, H., Duvell, F., Jones, K. & Skleparis, D. (2016). Understanding the dynamics of migration to Greece and the EU: Drivers, decisions and destinations. *MEDMIG Research Brief No.2*. Retrieved from: http://www.medmig.info/research-brief-02-Understanding-the-dynamics-of-migration-to-Greece-and-the-EU.pdf

Crouch, C. (2004). *Post-democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Crum, B. (2013). Saving the Euro at the cost of democracy?. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 51*, 614-630.

Crum, B. (2018). Parliamentary accountability in multilevel governance: What role for parliaments in post-crisis EU economic governance?. *Journal of European Public Policy, 25*(2), 268-286.

Crum, B. & Merlo, S. (2020). Democratic legitimacy in the post-crisis EMU. *Journal of European Integration, 42*(3), 399-413.

Dahl, R. (2000). *On democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Dassonneville, R., & Lewis-Beck, M. (2014). The economic voter and economic crisis. *Acta Politica, 49*, 369–371.

Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 20*, 43-63.

De Vries, C. (2018a). *Euroscepticism and the future of European integration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

De Vries, C. (2018b). The cosmopolitan-parochial divide: Changing patterns of party and electoral competition in the Netherlands and beyond. *Journal of European Public Policy, 25*(11), 1541-1565.

Della Porta, D. (2008). Eventful protest, global conflicts. *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory, 9*(2), 27-56.

Della Porta, D. (2013). *Can democracy be saved? Participation, deliberation and social movements*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Della Porta, D. (2015). *Social movements in times of austerity: Bringing capitalism back into protest analysis*. Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press.

Della Porta, D. (Ed.) (2018). *Solidarity mobilizations in the 'refugee crisis'. Contentious moves.* UK: Palgrave MacMillan.

Della Porta, D., Fernandez, J., Kouki, H., & Mosca, L. (2017). *Movement parties against austerity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Della Porta, D., & Keating, M. (Eds.) (2008). *Approaches and methodologies in the social sciences: A pluralist perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Denzin, N. K. (2010). Moments, mixed methods, and paradigm dialogs. *Qualitative Inquiry, 16*(6), 419–427.

Diani, M., & Kousis, M. (2014). The duality of claims and events: The Greek campaign against the Troika's memoranda and austerity, 2010-2012. *Mobilization, 19*(4), 387-404.

Dolezal, M. (2008). Germany: The dog that didn't bark. In H. Kriesi, E. Grande, R. Lachat, M. Dolezal, S. Bornschier, & T. Frey (Eds.), *West European politics in the age of globalization* (p. 208-233). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dostal, J. M. (2015). The Pegida movement and German political culture: Is right-wing populism here to stay?. *The Political Quarterly, 86*, 523-531.

Duchesne, S., Frazer, E., Haegel, F., & Van Ingelgom, V. (Eds.) (2013). *Citizens' reactions to European integration compared: Overlooking Europe*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ellinas, A. A. (2015). Neo-Nazism in an established democracy: The persistence of Golden Dawn in Greece. *South European Society and Politics*, *20*(1), 1-20.

El-Tayeb, F. (2015). Germany and Europe: Negotiating identity in a multicultural present. In S. Colvin, & M. Taplin (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of German politics & culture* (p. 285-300). UK: Routledge.

Engler, F., Bauer-Blaschkowski, S., & Zohlnhöfer, R. (2019). Disregarding the voters? Electoral competition and the Merkel government's public policies 2013–17. *German Politics, 28*(3), 312-331.

Featherstone, K., & Sotiropoulos, D. A. (Eds.) (2020). *The Oxford handbook of modern Greek politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ferrín, M., & Kriesi, H. (Eds.) (2016). *How Europeans view and evaluate democracy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fishkin, J. S. (1991). *Democracy and deliberation: New directions for democratic reform*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.

Fligstein, N., Polyakova, A., & Sandholtz, W. (2012). European integration, nationalism and European identity. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 50*, 106-122.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 12*(2), 219-245.

Follesdal, A., & Hix, S. (2006). Why there is a democratic deficit in the EU: A response to Majone and Moravcsik. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 44*, 533-562.

Franklin, M. N. (2004). *Voter turnout and the dynamics of electoral competition in established democracies since 1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Funk, N. (2016). A spectre in Germany: Refugees, a 'welcome culture' and an 'integration politics'. *Journal of Global Ethics, 12*(3), 289-299.

Galariotis, I., Georgiadou, V., Kafe, A., & Lialiouti, Z. (2017). Xenophobic manifestations, otherness and violence in Greece 1996-2016: Evidence from an event analysis in media collections. *EUI Working Papers*, MWP 2017/08: 1-28.

Gamson, A. W. (1992). *Talking politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Gamson, W., & Meyer, D. (1996). Framing political opportunity. In D. McAdam, J. McCarthy, & M. Zald (Eds.), *Comparative perspectives on social movements: Political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and cultural framings* (p. 275-290). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Garyfallou, A. (2020). Uprising in the streets and ballots: Polarisation and radicalisation in the Greek crisis. In C. Saunders, & B. Klandermans (Eds.), *When citizens talk about politics* (p. 115-134). UK: Routledge.

GGcrisi (2013). The Greeks, the Germans and the crisis. Discursive actor attribution analysis of the Eurozone crisis debate. Retrieved from http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~jroose/ggcrisi/Publications.htm

Giugni, M., & Grasso, M. T. (2015*). Austerity and protest: Popular contention in times of economic crisis.* UK: Routledge.

Graf, R., & Jarausch, K. H. (2017). "Crisis" in contemporary history and historiography. Version: 1.0. *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*. Retrieved from http://docupedia.de/zg/graf_jarausch_crisis_v1_en_2017.

Grimm, R. (2015). The rise of the German Eurosceptic party Alternative für Deutschland, between ordoliberal critique and popular anxiety. *International Political Science Review*, 36(3), 264–278.

Gunther, R. (2005). Parties and electoral behaviour in Southern Europe. *Comparative Politics, 37,* 253–275.

Habermas, J. (1996). *Between facts and norms: Contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Habermas, J. (2012). The crisis of the European Union in the light of a constitutionalization of international law. *European Journal of International Law*, *23*, 335-348.

Hall, P. A. (2018). Varieties of capitalism in light of the euro crisis. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *25*(1), 7-30.

Harvey, D. (2007). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Haug, F. (2009). The “four-in-one perspective”: A manifesto for a more just life. *Socialism and Democracy, 23*(1), 119-123.

Hay, C. (1996). Narrating crisis: The discursive construction of the `Winter of Discontent'. *Journal of Sociology, 30(2),* 253-277.

Hay, C. (2007). *Why we hate politics*. Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Held, D. (2006). *Models of democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Helms, L., Van Esch, F., & Crawford, B. (2019). Merkel III: From committed pragmatist to ‘conviction leader’?. *German Politics, 28*(3), 350-370.

Hernandez, E., & Kriesi, H. (2016). The electoral consequences of the financial and economic crisis in Europe. *European Journal of Political Research, 55(2),* 203-224.

Hindmoor, A., & McConnell, A. (2015). The contradictions and battlegrounds of crisis management. In G. Karyotis, & R. Gerodimos (Eds.), *The politics of extreme austerity: Greece in the Eurozone crisis. New perspectives on South-East Europe* (p. 15-33). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hobolt, S. B., & Tilley, J. (2016). Fleeing the centre: The rise of challenger parties in the aftermath of the Euro crisis. *West European Politics, 39(5),* 971-991.

Hooghe, L., & Marks, G. (2018). Cleavage theory meets Europe’s crises: Lipset, Rokkan, and the transnational cleavage. *Journal of European Public Policy, 25,* 109-135.

Hübner, K. (2015). Europeanization and globalization as drivers of the German growth model. In S. Colvin, & M. Taplin, (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of German politics & culture* (p. 391-408). UK: Routledge.

Hutter, S. (2014). *Protesting culture and economics in Western Europe: New cleavages in the left and right politics*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Hutter, S., & Kriesi, H. (Eds.) (2019a). *European party politics in times of crisis.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hutter, S., & Kriesi, H. (2019b). Politicizing Europe in times of crisis. *Journal of European Public Policy, 26*(7), 996-1017.

Hutter, S., Kriesi, H., & Lorenzini, J. (2019). Social movements interactions with political parties. In D. Snow, S. A. Soule, H. Kriesi, & H. McCammon (Eds.), *The Blackwell companion to social movements* (p. 322-337). Oxford: Wiley.

Hutter, S., Kriesi, H., & Vidal, G. (2018). Old versus new politics: The political spaces in Southern Europe in times of crises. *Party Politics. 24*(1), 10-22.

Infomigrants (2019). Carola Rackete and Pia Klemp: Two German sea captains who put their duty before the law. Retrieved from https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/17873/carola-rackete-and-pia-klemp-two-german-sea-captains-who-put-their-duty-before-the-law

Inglehart, R. (1997). *Modernization and postmodernization: Cultural, economic, and political change in 43 societies.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Jessop, B. (2005). Critical realism and the strategic-relational approach. *New Formations: A Journal of Culture, Theory and Politics, 56*, 40-53.

Kalogeraki, S. (2018). Volunteering for refugees and asylum seekers in Greece. In C. Lahusen, & M. Grasso (Eds.), *Solidarity in Europe* (p. 169-194). UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Karapin, R. (2010). *Protest politics in Germany: Movements on the left and right since the 1960s.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Karyotis, G., & Gerodimos, R. (Eds.) (2015). *The politics of extreme austerity: Greece in the Eurozone crisis. New perspectives on South-East Europe*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Karyotis, G., & Rüdig, W. (2015). Protest participation, electoral choices, and public attitudes towards austerity in Greece. In G. Karyotis, & R. Gerodimos (Eds.), *The politics of extreme austerity: Greece in the Eurozone crisis. New perspectives on South-East Europe* (p. 123-141). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Katz R. S., & Crotty, W. J. (2006). *Handbook of party politics*. London: Sage.

Katz, R. S., & Mair, P. (1995). Changing models of party organization and party democracy: The emergence of the cartel party. *Party Politics, 1*(1), 5–28.

Katz, R. S., & Mair, P. (2009). The cartel party thesis: A restatement. *Perspectives on Politics, 7*(4), 753-766.

Keating, M. (2008). Culture and social science. In D. Della Porta, & M. Keating (Eds.), *Approaches and methodologies in the social sciences: A pluralist perspective* (p. 99-117). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kelley, H. H. (1973). The processes of causal attribution. *American Psychologist, 28*, 107-128.

Kiess J., Lahusen C., & Zschache, U. (2018). Solidarity activism in Germany: What explains different types and levels of engagement?. In C. Lahusen, & M. Grasso (Eds.), *Solidarity in Europe* (p. 43-71). UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Klandermans, B. (1997). *The social psychology of protest*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Klandermans, B. (2013). How citizens try to influence politics and why? European Research Council Advanced Investigators Grant research proposal. Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

Kleres, J. (2018). Emotions in the crisis: Mobilizing for refugees in Germany and Sweden. In D. Della Porta (Ed.), *Solidarity mobilizations in the 'refugee crisis'. Contentious moves* (p. 209-241). UK: Palgrave MacMillan.

Kollmeyer, C. (2010). Globalization and democracy: The triumph of liberty over equality. In B. Wejnert (Ed.), *Democratic paths and trends* (p. 177-198). UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Koopmans, R. (1999). Political. Opportunity. Structure. Some splitting to balance the lumping. *Sociological Forum, 14***,** 93–105.

Koopmans, R., & Olzak, S. (2004). Discursive opportunities and the evolution of right-wing violence in Germany. *American Journal of Sociology, 110*(1), 198-230.

Koopmans, R., & Statham, P. (1999). Political claims analysis: Integrating protest event and political discourse approaches. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, *4* (2), 203–221.

Koselleck, R., & Richter, M. (2006). Crisis. *Journal of the History of Ideas, 67*(2), 357-400.

Kousis, M. (2017). Alternative forms of resilience confronting hard economic times. A South European perspective. *Partecipazione e Conflitto, 10*(1), 119-135.

Kriesi, H. (2004). Political context and opportunity. In D. A. Snow, S. A. Soule, & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell companion to social movements* (p. 67-90). Malden MA: Blackwell Publications.

Kriesi, H. (2014). The political consequences of the economic crises in Europe: Electoral punishment and popular protest. In N. Bermeo, & L. Bartels (Eds.), *Mass politics in tough times: Opinions, votes and protest in the Great Recession* (p. 297-333). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kriesi, H., Grande, E., Dolezal, M., Helbling, M., Hutter, S., Höglinger, D., & Wüest, B. (Eds.) (2012). *Political Conflict in Western Europe.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kriesi, H., Grande, E., Lachat, R., Dolezal, M., Bornschier, S. & Frey, T. (Eds.) (2008). *West European politics in the age of globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kriesi, H., Koopmans, R., Duyvendak, J. W., & Giugni, M. (1995). *New social movements in western Europe: A comparative analysis*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Kriesi H., & Pappas T. S. (Eds.) (2015). *European populism in the shadow of the Great Recession*. Colchester: ECPR Press.

Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2014). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. UK: Sage Publications.

Kutter, A. (2014). A catalytic moment: The Greek crisis in the German financial press. *Discourse & Society, 25*(4), 446–466.

Lahusen, C., & Grasso, M. (Eds.) (2018). *Solidarity in Europe*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lahusen, C., Kousis, M., Zschache, U. *et al.* (2018). European solidarity in times of crisis: Comparing transnational activism of civic organisations in Germany and Greece. *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie, 43***,** 173–197.

Lamont, M., & Molnár, V. (2002). The study of boundaries in the social sciences. *Annual Review of Sociology, 28,* 167-195.

Lees, C. (2001). Coalitions: Beyond the politics of centrality?. *German Politics, 10*(2), 117-134.

Lewis-Beck, M. S., & Stegmaier, M. (2007). Economic models of voting. In R. J. Dalton, & H. Klingemann (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political behaviour* (p. 519-537). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lipset, S. M., & Rokkan, S. (1967). Cleavage structures, party systems, and voter alignments: An introduction. In S. M. Lipset, & S. Rokkan (Eds.), *Party systems and voter alignments: Cross-national perspectives* (p. 1-64). Toronto: The Free Press.

LIVEWHAT. (2017). Living with hard times: How European citizens deal with economic crises and their social and political consequences. Final report summary. Retrieved from https://cordis.europa.eu/result/rcn/201572_en.html

Lupu, N. (2014). Brand dilution and the breakdown of political parties in Latin America. *World Politics, 66*(4), 561–602.

Lyrintzis, C. (2005). The changing party system: Stable democracy, contested modernization. *West European Politics, 28(2)*, 242-259.

Mair, P. (2009). Representative versus responsible government, *MplfG Working Paper* 09/8.

Mair, P. (2013). *Ruling the void. The hollowing of Western democracy*. London: Verso.

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review, 50*(4), 430-437.

Mattoni, A. (2014). The potentials of grounded theory in the study of social movements. In D. Della Porta (Ed.), *Methodological practices in social movement research* (p. 21-42) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mbembe, A. (2019). *Necropolitics*. London: Duke University Press.

McAdam, D. (1986). Recruitment to high-risk activism: The case of Freedom Summer. *American Journal of Sociology, 92(1)*, 64-90.

McAdam, D., & Tarrow, S. (2010). Ballots and barricades: On the reciprocal relationship between elections and social movements. *Perspectives on Politics, 8*, 529–542.

McAdam, D., Tarrow, S., & Tilly, C. (2001). *The dynamics of contention*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McCarthy, J., & Zald, M. (1977). Resource mobilization and social movements: A partial theory. *American Journal of Sociology, 82,* 1212–41.

Morgan, D. L. (1996). Focus groups. *Annual review of sociology*, 129-152.

Mouffe, C. (2000). *The democratic paradox*. London: Verso.

Murray-Leach, T., Kouki, H., Mattes, D., Mollenkamp, D., Radice, H., Saltman, E. M., Secondo, D., & Sommer, M. (2014). Crisis discourses in Europe. Media EU-phemisms and alternative narratives. Civil society and human security research unit. London School of Economics and Political Science. Retrieved from http://www.gcsknowledgebase.org/europe/files/2014/07/CrisisDiscoursesinEurope.pdf

Mushaben, J. M. (2017). Wir schaffen das! Angela Merkel and the European refugee crisis. *German Politics*, *26*(4), 516-533.

Myers, G. (1998). Displaying opinions: Topics and disagreement in focus groups. *Language in society*, *27*(1), 85-111.

Newman, A. L. (2010). Flight from risk: Unified Germany and the role of beliefs in the European response to the financial crisis. *German Politics and Society*, *28*(2), 151-164.

Nikolakakis, N. (2017). Syriza's stance vis-à-vis the European Union following the financial crisis: The persistence of left Europeanism and the role of the European left party. *European Politics and Society*, *18*(2), 128-147.

Norris, P. (2011). *Democratic deficit: Critical citizens revisited*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2019). *Cultural backlash: Trump, Brexit, and authoritarian populism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Oikonomakis, L. (2018). Solidarity in transition: The case of Greece. In D. Della Porta (Ed.), *Solidarity mobilizations in the 'refugee crisis'. Contentious moves* (p. 65-98). UK: Palgrave MacMillan.

Pagoulatos, G. (2020). State–market relations. In K. Featherstone, & D. A. Sotiropoulos (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of modern Greek politics* (p. 54-70). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pappas, T. S. (2003). The transformation of the Greek party system since 1951. *West European Politics, 26(2),* 90-114.

Pateman, C. (2012). Participatory democracy revisited. *Perspectives on politics, 10*(1), 7-19.

Perrin, A. J. (2006). *Citizen speak: The democratic imagination in American life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pitty, R. (2014). Disintegrating European austerity in Greece and Germany. In B. Isakhan, & S. Slaughter (Eds.), *Democracy and crisis* (p. 125-146). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Piven, F. F., & Cloward, R. A. (1977). *Poor people's movements: Why they succeed, how they fail*. New York: Vintage Books.

Polanyi, K. (1944). *The great transformation. The political and economic origins of our time.* New York: Farrar & Rinehart.

Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. London: Sage.

Putnam, R. D. (1995). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy*, *6*, 65–78.

Reese, G., & Lauenstein, O. (2014). The Eurozone crisis: Psychological mechanisms undermining and supporting European solidarity. *Journal of Social Sciences, 3*, 160-171.

Roberts, K. M. (2015). *Changing courses in Latin America. Party systems in the neoliberal era.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Roberts, K. M. (2017). State of the field. Party politics in hard times: Comparative perspectives on the European and Latin American economic crises. *European Journal of Political Research, 56*, 218-233.

Roos, J. E., & Oikonomakis, L. (2014). They don't represent us!: The global resonance of the real democracy movement from the Indignados to Occupy. In D. Della Porta, & A. Mattoni (Eds.), *Spreading protest: Social movements in times of crisis* (p. 117-136). Colchester: ECPR Press.

Roose, J., Kanellopoulos K., & Sommer, M. (2017). National anti-austerity protests in a European crisis: Comparing the Europeanizing impact of protest in Greece and Germany during the Eurozone crisis. *Journal of Civil Society, 13*(3), 284-306.

Roose, J., Sommer, M., Scholl, F., Kousis, M., Kanellopoulos, K., & Loukakis, A. (2017). Debating responsibility on the Eurozone crisis in traditional media newspaper reporting in Greece and Germany under a social media lens. In M. Barisione, & A. Michailidou (Eds.), *Social media and European politics* (p. 267-290). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rodrik, D. (2011). *The Globalization paradox: Democracy and the future of the world economy.* New York: W.W. Norton.

Rodrik, D. (2013). Roepke lecture in Economic Geography: Who needs the nation-state?. *Economic Geography, 89*(1), 1-19.

Roth, F., Nowak-Lehmann, D. F., & Otter, T. (2013). Crisis and trust in national and European Union institutions: Panel evidence for the EU, 1999 to 2012. EUI RSCAS, 2013/31, EUDO - European Union Democracy Observatory. Retrieved from Cadmus, European University Institute Research Repository, at: http://hdl.handle.net/1814/26975

Rüdig, W. (2012). The perennial success of the German Greens. *Environmental Politics, 21*(1), 108-130.

Runciman, W. G. (1966). *Relative deprivation and social justice*. UK: Routledge.

Saalfeld, T. (2002). The German party system: Continuity and change. *German Politics, 11(3),* 99-130.

Saalfeld, T., & Schoen, H. (2015). Party politics and electoral behaviour. In S. Colvin, & M. Taplin (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of German politics and culture* (p. 105-118), New York: Routledge.

Saunders, C. (2008). Double-edged swords? Collective identity and solidarity in the environment movement. *The British Journal of Sociology, 59*, 227-253.

Saunders, C., & Klandermans, B. (Eds.) (2020). *When citizens talk about politics*. UK: Routledge.

Saunders, C., Klandermans, B., Price, S., Garyfallou, A., & Hutter, S. (2020). Introduction: When citizens talk about politics. Towards an analytical framework. In C. Saunders, & B. Klandermans (Eds.), *When citizens talk about politics* (p. 1-19). UK: Routledge.

Scharpf, F. W. (2011). Monetary union, fiscal crisis and the pre-emption of democracy. Cologne, *MPIfG Discussion Paper* 11/11.

Scharpf, F. W. (2015). After the crash: A perspective on multilevel European democracy. *European Law Journal*, *21*(3), 384-405.

Schmidt, V. A. (2013). Democracy and legitimacy in the European Union revisited: Input, output and ‘throughput’. *Political Studies*, *61*, 2-22.

Schmidt, V. A. (2014). Speaking to the markets or to the people? A discursive institutionalist analysis of the EU's sovereign debt crisis. *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations, 16*, 188-209.

Schmitt-Beck, R. (2017). The Alternative für Deutschland in the electorate: Between single-issue and right-wing populist party. *German Politics, 26*(1), 124-148.

Schmitt-Beck, R., & Lup, O. (2013). Seeking the soul of democracy: A review of recent research into citizens' political talk culture. *Swiss Political Science Review, 19*, 513-538.

Sewel, W. H. (1992). A Theory of structure: Duality, agency, and transformation. *American Journal of Sociology, 98(1)*, 1-29.

Sherif, M., & Sherif, C. W. (1953). *Groups in harmony and tension: An integration of studies on intergroup relations.* New York: Harper.

Simiti, M. (2020). Social Movements. In K. Featherstone, & D. A. Sotiropoulos (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of modern Greek politics* (p. 366-383). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Simon, B., & Klandermans, B. (2001). Politicized collective identity: A social psychological analysis. *American Psychologist, 56*(4), 319-331.

Sommer, M., Roose, J., Scholl, F., & Papanikolopoulos, D. (2016). The Eurozone crisis and party conflicts in Greece and Germany – Discursive struggles about responsibility. In T. Krieger, B. Neumärker, & D. Panke (Eds.), *Europe's Crisis* (p. 87-112). Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Sotirakopoulos, N. & Sotiropoulos, G. (2013). Direct democracy now: The Greek Indignados and the present cycle of struggles. *Current Sociology,* 61(4):1-14.

Srivastava, P. (2006). Reconciling multiple researcher positionalities and languages in international research. *Research in Comparative and International Education, 1*(3), 210-222.

Stanley, L. (2014). We're reaping what we sowed: Everyday crisis narratives and acquiescence to the age of austerity. *New Political Economy, 19*, 895-917.

Stanley, L. (2016). Using focus groups in Political Science and International Relations. *Politics, 36*, 236–249.

Stavrakakis, Y. (2014). The return of "the people": Populism and anti-populism in the shadow of the European crisis. *Constellations, 21*, 505-517.

Stavrakakis, Y., & Katsambekis, G. (2014). Left-wing populism in the European periphery: The case of SYRIZA. *Journal of Political Ideologies, 19*(2), 119-142.

Sternberg, C., Gartzou-Katsouyanni, K. & Nicolaidis, K. (2018). *The Greco-German affair in the Euro crisis.* Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Stoker, G. (2006). *Why politics matters: Making democracy work.* Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Stoker, G. & Hay, C. (2017). Understanding and challenging populist negativity towards politics: The perspectives of British citizens. *Political Studies, 65(1), 4-23*.

Stråth, B., & Wodak, R. (2009). Europe – Discourse – Politics – Media – History: Constructing 'crises'?. In A. Triandafyllidou, R. Wodak, & M. Krzyżanowski (Eds.), *The European Public Sphere and the Media* (p. 15-33). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Streeck, W. (2015). *Buying time: The delayed crisis of democratic capitalism*. London: Verso.

Street, A., & Hansen, R (2015). Immigration and integration. In S. Colvin, & M. Taplin (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of German politics & culture* (p. 181-197). UK: Routledge.

Tajfel, H. (1982). Social psychology of intergroup relations. *Annual Review of Psychology, 33*, 1-39.

Tarrow, S. G. (2011). *Power in movement: Social movements and contentious politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2003). Major issues and controversies in the use of mixed methods in the social and behavioural sciences. In A. Tashakkori, & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Handbook of mixed-methods in social and behavioural research* (p. 3-50). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Teperoglou, E., & Tsatsanis, E. (2014). Dealignment, de-legitimation and the implosion of the two-party system in Greece: The earthquake election of 6 May 2012. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties, 24(2)*, 222-242.

Theodossopoulos, D. (2013). Infuriated with the infuriated? Blaming tactics and discontent about the Greek financial crisis. *Current Anthropology, 54*(2), 200-221.

Theodossopoulos, D. (2014). The ambivalence of anti-austerity indignation in Greece: Resistance, hegemony and complicity. *History and Anthropology, 25*(4), 488-506.

Triandafyllidou, A. (2020). Migration in Greece. In K. Featherstone, & D. A. Sotiropoulos (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of modern Greek politics.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tsirbas, Y. (2020). The party system. In K. Featherstone, & D. A. Sotiropoulos (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of modern Greek politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Turner, J. C., Hogg, M. A., Oakes, P. J., Reicher, S. D., & Wetherell, M. S. (1987). *Rediscovering the social group: A self-categorization theory*. Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell.

Van Bezouw, M., Garyfallou, A., Oana, N., Rojon, S. A., & Saunders, C. (2020). Methodological appendix. In C. Saunders, & B. Klandermans (Eds.), *When citizens talk about politics* (p. 230-242). UK: Routledge.

Van Deth, J. W. (2014). A conceptual map of political participation. *Acta Politica, 49*, 349-367.

Van Dijk, T. A. (1992). Discourse and the denial of racism. *Discourse & Society, 3*(1), 87-118.

Van Stekelenburg, J., & Klandermans, B. (2013). The social psychology of protest. *Current Sociology, 61*, 886-905.

Vasilopoulou, S., & Halikiopoulou, D. (2020). Political culture. In K. Featherstone, & D. A. Sotiropoulos (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of modern Greek politics* (p. 336-350). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Verba, S., & Nie, N. (1972). *Participation in America: Political democracy and social equality*. New York: Harper & Row.

Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). *Voice and equality. Civic voluntarism in American politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Weber, M. (1949). *The methodology of the social sciences*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press.

Weber, M. (1965). *Politics as a vocation*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Weisskircher, M., & Hutter, S. (2020). Idle democrats? Talking about politics in Germany. In C. Saunders, & B. Klandermans (Eds.), *When citizens talk about politics* (p. 77-95). UK: Routledge.

Wenzel, M., Mummendey, A., & Waldzus, S. (2007). Superordinate identities and intergroup conflict: The ingroup projection model. *European Review of Social Psychology, 18*, 331-372.

Wetherell, M., & Edley, N. (1999). Negotiating hegemonic masculinity: Imaginary positions and psycho-discursive practices. *Feminism & Psychology, 9*(3), 335-356.

White, J. (2011). *Political allegiance after European integration*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wiggins, S. (2017). *Discursive psychology. Theory, method and applications*. UK: Sage Publications.

Williams, R. H. (2004). The cultural contexts of collective action: Constraints, opportunities, and the symbolic life of social movements. In D. A. Snow, S. A. Soule, & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*. Malden MA: Blackwell Publications.

Woolley, C. M. (2009). Meeting the mixed methods challenge of integration in a sociological study of structure and agency. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 3*(1), 7–25.

World population review (2020). Hardest working countries. Retrieved from https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/hardest-working-countries

Young, B. (2020). From sick man of Europe to the German economic power house. Two narratives: Ordoliberalism versus Euro-currency regime. *German Politics, 29*(3), 464-478.

Zamponi, L., & Bosi, L. (2016). Which Crisis? European crisis and national contexts in public discourse. *Politics and Policy, 44*, 400-426.

Appendices

Chapter 1

Table A1.1. Characteristics of survey participants by country

	Greece	**Germany**
Age (%)	18-34: 37%, 35-49: 46%, 50-65: 16%, M_{age}= 39 (11.0)	18-34: 39%, 35-49: 45%, 50-65: 17%, M_{age}= 40 (11.5)
Gender (%)	50% male, 50% female	51% male, 49% female
Education (lower 1-3 ISCED, 4 vocational, higher 5-6 ISCED)	52% lower, 10% vocational 38% higher	50% lower, 10% vocational, 40% higher
Employment (%)	57% employed, 24% unemployed, 7% in education, 5% retired	63% employed, 5% unemployed, 12% in education, 7% retired

Table A1.3. The focus group screening questionnaire

1. Name: Click here to enter text.
2. Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐
3. Date of Birth: Click here to enter text.
4. Country of Birth: Click here to enter text.
5. Nationality: Click here to enter text.
6. What is the highest level of education you have completed or in the process of completing?: Click here to enter text.
7. Which of these descriptions **best** describes your current activity ? (please tick one):
   - ☐ in paid work either as an employee or self-employed
   - ☐ in education
   - ☐ unemployed and actively looking for a job
   - ☐ unemployed but not actively looking for a job
   - ☐ permanently sick or disabled
   - ☐ retired
   - ☐ doing housework, looking after children or other persons

☐ other: Click here to enter text.

8. If you are in paid work what is your current occupation?: Click here to enter text.

9. Do you consider yourself to be a member of a minority group (for example a religious, ethnic minority or other):
   a. yes ☐ no ☐
   b. if yes, which one?: Click here to enter text.

10. How interested would you say you are in politics on a scale where 0 means not interested at all and 10 means very interested? Please tick one of the following boxes:

Not interested at all Very interested	
0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐	☐ Don't Know

11. In politics people sometimes talk of 'left' and 'right'. Where would you place your views on this scale, where 0 means left and 10 means right? Please tick one of the following boxes:

Left Right	
0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐	☐ Don't Know

12. Have you taken part in any of the following activities…..

	In the past 12 months	Ever (but not in last 12 months)	Never
contacted a politician, government or local government official	☐	☐	☐
donated money to an organisation	☐	☐	☐
used internet to write or share political content	☐	☐	☐
worn or displayed a campaign badge or sticker	☐	☐	☐
boycotted or bought certain products for political or ethical reasons	☐	☐	☐
joined a strike	☐	☐	☐
signed a petition	☐	☐	☐
taken part in a public demonstration	☐	☐	☐

any other act of protest (specify):	☐	☐	☐

13. Did you vote in the last national election?:
    a. yes ☐ no ☐
    b. if yes, which party or candidate did you vote for?:

14. On a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 means strongly disagree and 10 means strongly agree, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

    a. My participation in politics can have an impact on public policy in this country.

Strongly disagree Strongly agree	
0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐	☐ Don't Know

    b. Organised groups of people can have an impact on public policies in this country.

Strongly disagree Strongly agree	
0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐	☐ Don't Know

15. How did you find out about this focus group? Click here to enter text.

16. How can we contact you regarding the focus group?
    a. Contact number: Click here to enter text.
    b. Email address: Click here to enter text.

Home address: Click here to enter text.

Table A1.4 Characteristics of focus group participants by country

	Greece	**Germany**
Gender (%)	55% male, 45% female	54% male, 46% female
Education (lower 1-4 ISCED, higher 5-6 ISCED)	46% lower, 54% higher	45% lower, 55% higher
Political interest (0 not at all – 10 very much)	7.7 (2.2)	8.1 (1.7)
Left – Right self-placement (0 left – 10 right)	4.0 (2.5)	4.7 (1.9)
Collective efficacy (0 not at all – 10 very much)	7.0 (2.4)	7.1 (1.6)
Voting (%)	64% last election	87% last election
Demonstration (%)	40% last 12 months	44% last 12 months

Table A1.5. Greek focus group participants

	Fictitious Name	*Focus Group*	*Age*	*Gender*	*Education*	*Political Interest*	*Ideology*	*Voting*	*Demonstration*
1	Paulina	18-25LE	21	Female	Secondary	0	3	No	Last 12months
2	Iasonas	18-25LE	21	Male	Secondary	7	5	No	Ever
3	Lambros	18-25LE	25	Male	Secondary	8	0	No	Last 12months
4	Vlassis	18-25LE	18	Male	Secondary	6	5	Yes	Ever
5	Alexis	18-25LE	18	Male	Secondary	8	4	Yes	Ever
6	Korina	18-25LE	19	Female	Secondary	8	0	No	Last 12months
7	Mihalis	18-25HE	24	Male	Tertiary	10	0	No	Last 12months
8	Georgia	18-25HE	24	Female	Tertiary	10	0	No	Last 12months
9	Petros	18-25HE	21	Male	Tertiary	4	7	No	Ever
10	Giorgos	18-25HE	23	Male	Tertiary	7	5	Yes	Ever

11	Maria	18-25HE	20	Female	Tertiary	8	3	Yes	Last 12months
12	Niki	26-40LE	27	Female	Secondary	6	5	No	Last 12months
13	Alkisti	26-40LE	29	Female	Secondary	7	5	Yes	Ever
14	Nikos	26-40LE	38	Male	Secondary	8	3	Yes	No
15	Valantis	26-40LE	27	Male	Secondary	8	0	Yes	Last 12months
16	Manos	26-40LE	40	Male	Secondary	7	1	Yes	Ever
17	Vivi	26-40HE	30	Female	Tertiary	6	5	No	Ever
18	Stamatis	26-40HE	35	Male	Tertiary	8	5	Yes	No
19	Anna	26-40HE	27	Female	Tertiary	7	3	No	Last 12months
20	Athanasia	26-40HE	34	Female	Tertiary	10	5	Yes	No
21	Aggeliki	26-40HE	27	Female	Tertiary	3	5	No	Last 12months
22	Makis	26-40HE	37	Male	Tertiary	10	7	Yes	Ever
23	Nikos	41-60LE	59	Male	Secondary	8	5	Yes	No
24	Minas	41-60LE	46	Male	Secondary	9	3	Yes	Ever
25	Despoina	41-60LE	57	Female	Secondary	4	2	Yes	Ever
26	Eleni	41-60LE	51	Female	Secondary	4	5	No	Ever
27	Evaggelia	41-60LE	41	Female	Secondary	7	6	No	No
28	Olga	41-60LE	45	Female	Secondary	8	3	Yes	Last 12months
29	Lina	41-60LE	44	Female	Secondary	8	6	Yes	Ever
30	Nikos	41-60HE	42	Male	Tertiary	5	5	No	Ever
31	Ionas	41-60HE	57	Male	Tertiary	10	10	No	Last 12months
32	Kostas	41-60HE	59	Male	Tertiary	9	4	Yes	Ever
33	Takis	41-60HE	50	Male	Tertiary	10	3	Yes	Last 12months
34	Alexia	41-60HE	47	Female	Tertiary	5	6	Yes	No
35	Aliki	41-60HE	55	Female	Tertiary	5	3	Yes	Ever
36	Kiki	61+LE	62	Female	Secondary	8	7	Yes	No
37	Liza	61+LE	65	Female	Secondary	10	1	Yes	Last 12months
38	Savvas	61+LE	63	Male	Secondary	8	5	Yes	Ever
39	Kyriakos	61+LE	67	Male	Primary	8	7	Yes	No
40	Kosmas	61+LE	73	Male	Primary	7	7	Yes	No
41	Andreas	61+HE	62	Male	Tertiary	10	5	Yes	Last 12months

42	Platonas	61+HE	67	Male	Tertiary	10	4	Yes	Last 12months
43	Zacharias	61+HE	61	Male	Tertiary	8	1	Yes	Ever
44	Koula	61+HE	64	Female	Tertiary	7	5	Yes	Ever
45	Rosa	61+HE	65	Female	Tertiary	4	6	Yes	No
46	Nasos	Activists	46	Male	Tertiary	10	10	Yes	Ever
47	Panos	Activists	27	Male	Tertiary	9	0	Yes	Last 12months
48	Giorgos	Activists	33	Male	Tertiary	9	0	No	Last 12months
49	Vlassis	Activists	25	Male	Tertiary	10	8	No	Ever
50	Lena	Activists	59	Female	Tertiary	8	7	No	No

Table 1.6. German focus group participants

	Fictitious Name	*Focus Group*	*Age*	*Gender*	*Education*	*Political Interest*	*Ideology*	*Voting*	*Demonstration*
1	Norbert	18-25LE	18	Male	Secondary	7	6	Yes	Ever
2	Jan	18-25LE	23	Male	Secondary	9	2	Yes	Ever
3	Jasmin	18-25LE	23	Female	Secondary	4	5	No	Last 12months
4	Stephan	18-25LE	25	Male	Secondary	7	3	No	No
5	Helga	18-25HE	20	Female	Tertiary	8	6	No	No
6	Gerhard	18-25HE	24	Male	Tertiary	7	5	Yes	No
7	Melanie	18-25HE	23	Female	Tertiary	9	7	Yes	Ever
8	Stefanie	18-25HE	25	Female	Tertiary	8	5	Yes	Last 12months
9	Johann	18-25HE	19	Male	Tertiary	6	3	Yes	No
10	Leopold	18-25HE	25	Male	Tertiary	9	4	No	No
11	Anastasia	26-40LE	27	Female	Secondary	4	4	Yes	No
12	Armin	26-40LE	34	Male	Secondary	9	5	Yes	No
13	Doris	26-40LE	33	Female	Secondary	8	4	Yes	Last 12months
14	Igor	26-40LE	37	Male	Secondary	10	5	Yes	Ever
15	Anton	26-40HE	28	Male	Tertiary	10	1	Yes	Last 12months
16	Jasmin	26-40HE	26	Female	Tertiary	7	3	Yes	Last 12months
17	Leopold	26-40HE	34	Male	Tertiary	4	4	Yes	No
18	Jens	26-40HE	39	Male	Tertiary	10	6	Yes	Last 12months

19	Gudrun	26-40HE	39	Female	Tertiary	9	7	Yes	No
20	Susanne	26-40HE	34	Female	Tertiary	3	5	Yes	No
21	Jennifer	41-60LE	45	Female	Secondary	9	3	Yes	Last 12months
22	Christine	41-60LE	41	Female	Secondary	8	7	Yes	Last 12months
23	Melanie	41-60LE	54	Female	Secondary	7	4	Yes	Ever
24	Sascha	41-60LE	42	Female	Secondary	10	5	Yes	Ever
25	Konstantin	41-60LE	53	Male	Secondary	8	5	No	No
26	Marko	41-60LE	46	Male	Secondary	6	8	No	Ever
27	Alexander	41-60HE	43	Male	Tertiary	9	5	Yes	No
28	Ingrid	41-60HE	58	Female	Tertiary	8	4	Yes	Last 12months
29	Pauline H	41-60HE	49	Female	Tertiary	10	5	Yes	Ever
30	Pauline C	41-60HE	46	Female	Tertiary	9	2	Yes	Last 12months
31	Konrad	41-60HE	45	Male	Tertiary	8	8	Yes	No
32	Otto	41-60HE	54	Male	Tertiary	8	7	Yes	Ever
33	Benjamin	61+LE	62	Male	Secondary	10	0	Yes	Last 12months
34	Wilma	61+LE	62	Female	Secondary	8	5	Yes	Last 12months
35	Patricia	61+LE	68	Female	Secondary	8	7	Yes	Ever
36	Boris	61+LE	70	Male	Secondary	8	5	Yes	Ever
37	Dieter	61+LE	72	Male	Secondary	8	4	Yes	Last 12months
38	Krtistina	61+LE	71	Female	Secondary	7	3	Yes	No
39	Ursula	61+HE	63	Female	Tertiary	8	8	Yes	Ever
40	Elias	61+HE	71	Male	Tertiary	10	3	Yes	Last 12months
41	Hugo	61+HE	65	Male	Tertiary	10	4	Yes	Ever
42	Reinhardt	61+HE	67	Male	Tertiary	9	8	Yes	Last 12months
43	Doris	61+HE	61	Female	Tertiary	10	6	Yes	Last 12months
44	Helga	Activists	54	Female	Tertiary	9	7	Yes	Last 12months
45	Laurenz	Activists	57	Male	Secondary	8	5	Yes	Last 12months
46	Beatrix	Activists	45	Female	Secondary	9	4	Yes	Last 12months
47	Walter	Activists	55	Male	Tertiary	10	0	Yes	Last 12months
48	Jorg	Activists	49	Male	Tertiary	10	4	Yes	Last 12months

Table A1.7. Coding of strategies

<table>
<tr><th>STRAT1</th><th>STRAT2</th><th>Evaluations</th><th>Personal experience</th></tr>
<tr><td>Coded before pictures shown</td><td colspan="3">Coded before and after pictures shown</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Nothing (people can’t do anything)</td><td>Protest Politics

• Occupations
• Petitions
• Demonstrations/marches
• Strikes
• Violent protest
• Campaigning</td><td rowspan="5">Any discussion regarding evaluation of aforementioned forms of political participation (positive, negative, ambivalent)</td><td rowspan="5">Discourse regarding one’s own experience as a participant in a form of political action (not witnessing).</td></tr>
<tr><td>Institutional Politics

• Voting
• Contact a politician
• Joining a political party
• Running for office
• Referenda
• Citizens’ initiatives</td></tr>
<tr><td>Civic Engagement

• Neighbourhood watch
• Community Centres
• Food(Time) Banks (LETS)
• Charity/Fundraising
• Citizens’ Assemblies</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Action by Institutions (deferred responsibility do not use when institutions are a cause). Use this when participants respond to what ‘people’ can do with a solution that is about the state</td><td>Lifestyle Politics

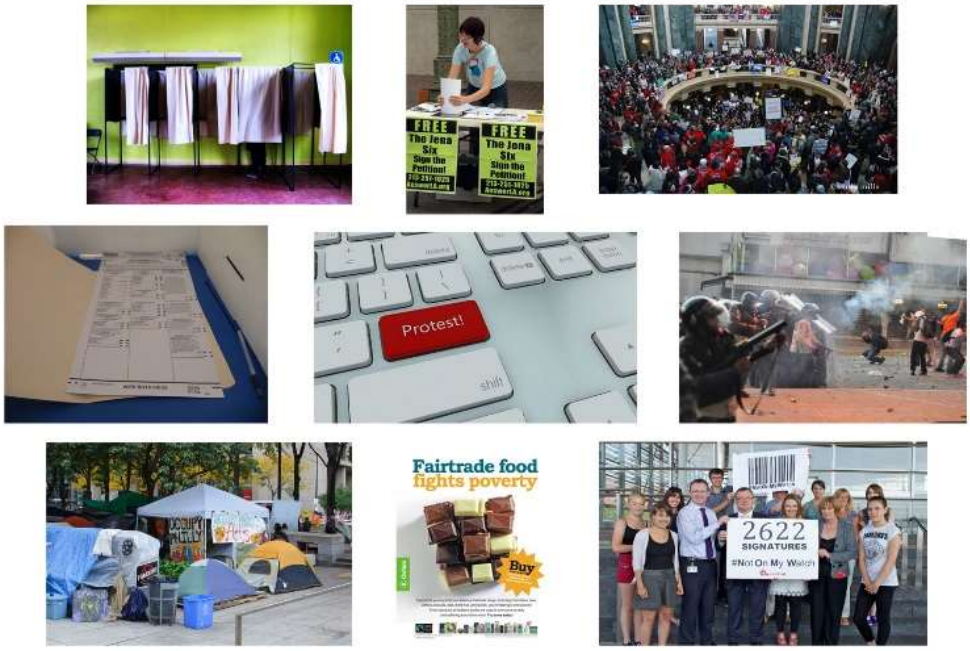
• Political consumerism
• Recycling
• Cycling to work
• Be the change you want to see</td></tr>
<tr><td>Raising Awareness

• Sharing information online
• Contacting media to express views
• Creating alternative media (Indymedia)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Exit

• Emigrate
• Leave the city</td></tr>
<tr><td>Unspecified Citizen Action</td></tr>
</table>

Figure A1.1. Moderator's sticky notes. Most important issues on the right and proposed political strategies on the left (retrieved from Van Bezouw et al., 2020)

Figure A1.2. Pictures used to prompt discussion of what people can do about important issues (retrieved from Van Bezouw et al., 2020)



Chapter 4

Table A4.1. Most important issues in Greece and Germany

Most important Issues in society	**Greece**	**Germany**	*Chi square Sig*
Unemployment	(1) 64%	(10) 11%	X^2 *(1,2230)=737.1, p<.001*
Poverty	(2) 40%	(4) 25%	X^2 *(1,2230)=60.7, p<.001*
Taxation	(2) 40%	(9) 12%	X^2 *(1,2230)=250.4, p<.001*
Healthcare	(3) 30%	(8) 13%	X^2 *(1,2230)=102.1, p<.001*
Immigration	(4) 24%	(1) 48%	X^2 *(1,2230)=169.1, p<.001*
Corruption	(5) 23%	(11) 6%	X^2 *(1,2230)=134.1, p<.001*
Education	(6) 20%	(3) 26%	X^2 *(1,2230)=13.7, p<.001*
Political system	(7) 19%	(10) 11%	X^2 *(1,2230)=32.1, p<.001*
Inflation	(8) 13%	(6) 20%	X^2 *(1,2230)=21.8, p<.001*
Pensions	(9) 10%	(3) 26%	X^2 *(1,2230)=111.0, p<.001*
Crime	(9) 9%	(6) 20%	X^2 *(1,2230)=67.8, p<.001*
Environment	(11) 3%	(5) 24%	X^2 *(1,2230)=279.1, p<.001*
Housing	(12) 2%	(7) 15%	X^2 *(1,2230)=153.1, p<.001*
Terrorism	(13) 1%	(2) 36%	X^2 *(1,2230)=575.1, p<.001*
Gender Inequality	(13) 1%	(12) 5%	X^2 *(1,2230)=53.5, p<.001*
	(N=1120)	(N=1110)	

Table A4.7. Democratic aspirations in Greece and Germany

Democratic quality	**Aspirations**	**Aspirations**	***T-test Sig***
(0=not at all, 10=very much)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
	Greece	**Germany**	
Courts treat everyone the same	9,1 (1,8)	8,4 (2,1)	*t(2228) = -8.50, P<.001*
Government protects citizens against poverty	9,0 (1,8)	7,8 (2,2)	*t(2228) = -16.44, P<.001*
Free and fair elections	8,9 (1,9)	8,2 (2,1)	*t(2228) = -8.94, P<.001*
Media are free to criticize the government	8,4 (2,3)	8,2 (2,1)	*t(2228) = -1.40, P=.16*
Citizens voting in referenda	8,0 (2,3)	7,3 (2,3)	*t(2228) = -7.47, P<.001*
Citizens can participate in public meetings	8,0 (2,2)	7,8 (2,1)	*t(2228) = -1.61, P=.11*
Political parties offer alternatives	8,0 (2,3)	6,9 (2,1)	*t(2228) = -12.33, P<.001*
	(N=1120)	**(N=1110)**	

Table A4.7. Democratic evaluations in Greece and Germany

Democratic quality	**Evaluations**	**Evaluations**	***T-test Sig***
(0=not at all, 10=very much)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
	Greece	**Germany**	
Free and fair elections	6,0 (2,9)	7,2 (2,6)	*t(2228) = 10.64, P<.001*
Media are free to criticize the government	4,3 (3,1)	7,1 (2,5)	*t(2228) = 24.42, P<.001*
Political parties offer alternatives	3,4 (2,6)	5,3 (2,3)	*t(2228) = 19.70, P<.001*
Courts treat everyone the same	2,8 (2,8)	5,5 (2,8)	*t(2228) = 24.54, P<.001*
Citizens voting in referenda	2,5 (2,8)	3,8 (3,0)	*t(2228) = 10.91, P<.001*
Citizens can participate in public meetings	2,3 (2,4)	5,8 (2,7)	*t(2228) = 34.96, P<.001*
Government protects citizens against poverty	2,0 (2,4)	4,4 (2,8)	*t(2228) = 23.12, P<.001*
	(N=1120)	**(N=1110)**	

Table A4.8. Political strategies (last 12 months) in the movement and party arena in Greece and Germany

Political strategies	**Last 12 months**	**Last 12 months**	***Chi square test Sig***
	Greece	**Germany**	
Vote	80%	65%	*X^2 (1,2230)=52.1, p<.001*
EU vote	62%	46%	*X^2 (1,2230)=14.2, p=.003*
Boycott	38%	20%	*X^2 (1,2230)=4.59, p=.02*
Petition	20%	23%	*X^2 (1,2230)=0.17, p=.68*
Strike	16%	2%	*X^2 (1,2230)=27.1, p<.001*
Referenda	14%	8%	*X^2 (1,2230)=11.4, p<.001*
Demonstration	19%	6%	*X^2 (1,2230)=6.4, p=.01*
Social media	14%	7%	*X^2 (1,2230)=1.09, p=.30(ns)*
Town hall meeting	9%	6%	*X^2 (1,2230)=3.52, p=.06*
Contacting	7%	5%	*X^2 (1,2230)=0.01, p=.91(ns)*
	(N=1120)	(N=1110)	

Table A4.8. Political strategies (ever) in the movement and party arena in Greece and Germany

Political strategies	**Ever**	**Ever**	*Chi square test Sig*
	Greece	**Germany**	
Vote	86%	71%	X^2 *(1,2230)=91.4, p<.001*
Referenda	75%	30%	X^2 *(1,2230)=550.4, p<.001*
EU vote	65%	50%	X^2 *(1,2230)=58.6, p<.001*
Boycott	51%	29%	X^2 *(1,2230)=127.3, p<.001*
Demonstration	45%	19%	X^2 *(1,2230)=195.2, p<.001*
Petition	42%	47%	X^2 *(1,2230)=9.21, p=.002*
Strike	32%	11%	X^2 *(1,2230)=166.1, p<.001*
Social media	22%	12%	X^2 *(1,2230)=43.1, p<.001*
Town hall meeting	19%	15%	X^2 *(1,2230)=8.21, p=.004*
Contacting	15%	12%	X^2 *(1,2230)=5.08, p=.03*
	(N=1120)	(N=1110)	

Table A4.8. Efficacy of political strategies in the movement and party arena in Greece and Germany

Political strategies	**Efficacy** (1-5 scale) Mean (SD)	**Efficacy** (1-5 scale) Mean (SD)	***T-test Sig***
	Greece	**Germany**	
Vote	3,2 (1,4)	3,4 (1,2)	*t(2228) = 3.18, P=.001*
EU vote	3,1 (1,4)	3,1 (1,2)	*t(2228) = 1.34, P=.18(ns)*
Boycott	2,9 (1,4)	2,9 (1,3)	*t(2228) = -0.30, P=.76(ns)*
Referenda	2,8 (1,4)	3,4 (1,2)	*t(2228) = 11.48, P<.001*
Strike	2,8 (1,3)	2,6 (1,2)	*t(2228) = 3.67, P<.001*
Petition	2,7 (1,2)	3,1 (1,2)	*t(2228) = 6.96, P<.001*
Demonstration	2,6 (1,3)	2,7 (1,2)	*t(2228) = 1.56, P=.12(ns)*
Town hall meeting	2,5 (1,3)	2,9 (1,2)	*t(2228) = 9.06, P<.001*
Contacting	2,0 (1,1)	2,4 (1,2)	*t(2228) = 9.86, P<.001*
Social media	1,1 (1,2)	1,2(1,1)	*t(2228) = 1.26, P=.20(ns)*
	(N=1120)	(N=1110)	

Chapter 5

Table A5.1. Thematic analysis of discourse about crises in Greece

Social construction	Discursive performance	Subject positioning
• **Financial crisis (national level)**: Mode of survival; welfare state retrenchment; Unemployment-exploitation; Depression, homelessness, drug abuse, suicides; Emigration ▪ **Refugee crisis (European level):** Illegitimate wars, Greek solidarity, lack of European solidarity, EU incompetence, extra burden ▪ **Political crisis (national & European level):** clientelism, corruption, responsiveness &responsibility, economic interests/post-democracy, Troika & TINA doctrine	• Forced poverty, Exemplary **punishment (**TINA), National and EU politicians, capitalism/globalization to blame • Poor but hospitable, Wealthy Europeans don't share, **Identification with the weak**, oil-wars & EU to blame • Fatalism, victimization, conspiracy theorizing, Troika as foreign occupation, **EU as the right of the strongest**, Citizens, politicians and EU to blame	• Subjects: not European enough, **inferiority complex** • Others: Wealthy but insensitive Europeans, Germans/EU • Subjects: poor but hospitable, **deferring racism accusations** • Others: Wealthy but insensitive Europeans (more racist) • Subjects: politically aware &responsible citizens • Others: corrupt politicians &citizens, EU/Troika/ Germans, **the invisible world**

Table A5.2. Thematic analysis of discourse about crises in Germany

Social construction	Discursive performance	Subject positioning
• **Financial crisis (European level)**: Griechenlandkrise, responsible for our debts, Hamsterwheel, budget cuts, flexibility & precarity ▪ **Refugee crisis (national level):** Material/Symbolic threats, criminality &terrorism, wars in MENA, Lack of EU solidarity ▪ **Political crisis (national & European level):** convergence/lack of political options, crisis of responsiveness, puppets of the economy/post-democracy, EU as lobbyist association	• Paying again for others; fear for the future, Poverty in Germany too, Greeks, the EU & banks to blame (**Greek particularity**) • Foreigners in our country (integration); Islamophobia; **We can't do it or don't want it**; Politicians, the EU, &war to blame • **Punish mainstream parties, reward alternatives**; Europapolitik as big responsibility; Politicians & EU to blame	• Subjects: responsible, law-abiding (**good Europeans**) • Others: corrupt Greeks, retiring early but also relaxed & hospitable • Subjects: **welcoming but realists** • Others: Hungarians, Polish, British (no solidarity) • Subjects: law abiding but conformist (**powerlessness, silenced**) • Others: corrupt politicians, comfortable citizens, EU

Chapter 6

Table A6.1. Thematic analysis of discourse about political strategies in Greece

	Social construction of political strategies In Greece	**Discourse about grievances:** **Injustice/Blame**	**Discourse about mobilization:** **Identity/Boundaries**	**Discourse about opportunity:** **Agency /Motives**
Financial crisis	- **Institutions**: Produce again, exports - **Individual**: Boycotts of foreign products, emigration - **Collective**: Solidarity networks, alternative barter economy, anti-austerity movements & parties - **Expansion of political repertoire**: Alternative forms of resilience, solidarity networks	- **Issue:** Mode of survival, continuous pauperization - **Level:** National and European/global - **Injustice:** All citizens pay the price, yet not all corrupt, exemplary TINA punishment so that other Europeans know - **Responsibility:** Corrupt politicians, corrupt citizens, clientelism	- **Politicized collective identities:** The people against the markets - **political subjects:** lawful citizens, crisis-stricken citizens, the new homeless - **opponents:** corrupt citizens, corrupt politicians, the EU & German politicians (Merkel, Schäuble)	- **Citizenship:** Active - **Efficacy:** Moderate at the local level, low at the macro level - **Agency:** Revolution, collective economic strategy (e.g. not paying taxes)
Refugee crisis	- **Institutions**: Stop the war and export of weapons, Dublin regulation - **Individual**: Donations, volunteering - **Collective**: Solidarity networks, pro-refugee & anti-refugee movements & parties, - **Expansion of political repertoire**: Solidarity networks, Rescue teams on Greek islands	- **Issue:** Inhumane treatment of refugees**,** extra burden on a shuttered economy - **Level:** European/global & national - **Injustice:** Greece as the largest "hot spot", lack of EU solidarity - **Responsibility:** Superpowers competing for resources	- **Politicized collective identities:** poor but hospitable, the oppressed vs. superpowers - **political subjects:** fugitives of war & famine, caring citizens - **opponents:** superpowers wealthy but insensitive Europeans	- **Citizenship:** Active - **Efficacy:** Moderate at the local level, low at the macro level - **Agency:** Reform, offering hospitality
Political crisis	- **Institutions**: Democratic state, rule of law - **Individual**: Be good/lawful citizen, survivalism - **Collective**: Indignant movement, punishment of status quo, reward anti-austerity parties, referendum - **Expansion of political repertoire**: anti-austerity mobilization (movement, parties, networks)	- **Issue:** Crisis of responsiveness/responsibility, citizen representation - **Level:** National & European/global - **Injustice:** no influence no matter what strategy, Troika occupation - **Responsibility:** clientelism, post-democracy, capitalism	- **Politicized collective identities:** The people against the markets &corrupt politicians - **political subjects:** lawful citizens, crisis-stricken citizens - **opponents:** corrupt citizens & politicians, the Troika, German politicians (Merkel, Schäuble)	- **Citizenship:** Active - **Efficacy:** Moderate at the local & national level, low after SYRIZA's capitulation - **Agency:** Revolution, occupy the parliament don't pay taxes

Table A6.2. Thematic analysis of discourse about political strategies in Germany

	Social construction of political strategies in Germany	Discourse about grievances: Injustice/Blame	Discourse about mobilization: Identity/Boundaries	Discourse about opportunity: Agency /Motives
Financial crisis	- **Institutions**: Greek bailout packages, Grexit - **Individual**: Support Greek tourism, accurate information - **Collective**: Nothing - citizens were not asked, support anti-bailout - **Expansion of political repertoire**: international solidarity initiative, AfD	- **Issue:** Respect Eurozone criteria, economic threats - **Level:** European (Greek) &national - **Injustice:** we practiced restrain, why pay for others? - **Responsibility:** Greek corrupt politicians &citizens, laziness, early retirement	- **Politicized collective identities:** Responsible Germans vs. Irresponsible Greeks, German paymaster - **political subjects:** responsible citizens, disadvantaged groups - **opponents:** corrupt Greeks & politicians, the EU	- **Citizenship:** Passive - **Efficacy:** Low at the micro level, low/moderate at the level of institutions - **Agency:** Reform of Eurozone
Refugee crisis	- **Institutions**: Stop the war & arms trade, refugee camps in the MENA region - **Individual**: Donations, volunteering - **Collective**: Solidarity initiatives, pro-refugee & anti-refugee movements & parties - **Expansion of political repertoire**: welcoming initiatives, PEGIDA, AfD	- **Issue:** material & symbolic threats, foreign invasion, chaotic state response - **Level:** National & European/global - **Injustice:** Foreigners in own country, lack of European solidarity - **Responsibility:** War in Syria, Chancellor Merkel, federal government	- **Politicized collective identities:** welcoming but realists vs. unintegrated Muslims &radicals - **political subjects:** volunteers, realistic/rational citizens - **opponents:** Ch. Merkel, right & left-wing radicals, unintegrated Muslims, xenophobic EU countries	- **Citizenship:** Moderate - **Efficacy:** Moderate at the local level, low at the federal level - **Agency:** Reform of refugee policy
Political crisis	- **Institutions**: Democratic state, rule of law - **Individual**: Be good/lawful citizen, get informed, passivity - **Collective**: punishment of Grand coalition, support moderate alternatives, referenda - **Expansion of political repertoire**: New movements (TTIP, PEGIDA) & parties (AfD, Pirate Party)	- **Issue:** party convergence lack of options, crisis of representation - **Level:** National & European/global - **Injustice:** politicians don't listen, citizens are silenced - **Responsibility:** Corrupt politicians, passive citizens, post-democracy	- **Politicized collective identities:** The people against corrupt politicians - **political subjects:** responsible citizens, disadvantaged groups - **opponents:** the Grand Coalition, complacent citizens	- **Citizenship:** Moderate - **Efficacy:** Moderate at the local level, low at the federal level - **Agency:** Reform, moderate alternatives

Figure A6.1. The crises and political strategies in Greece

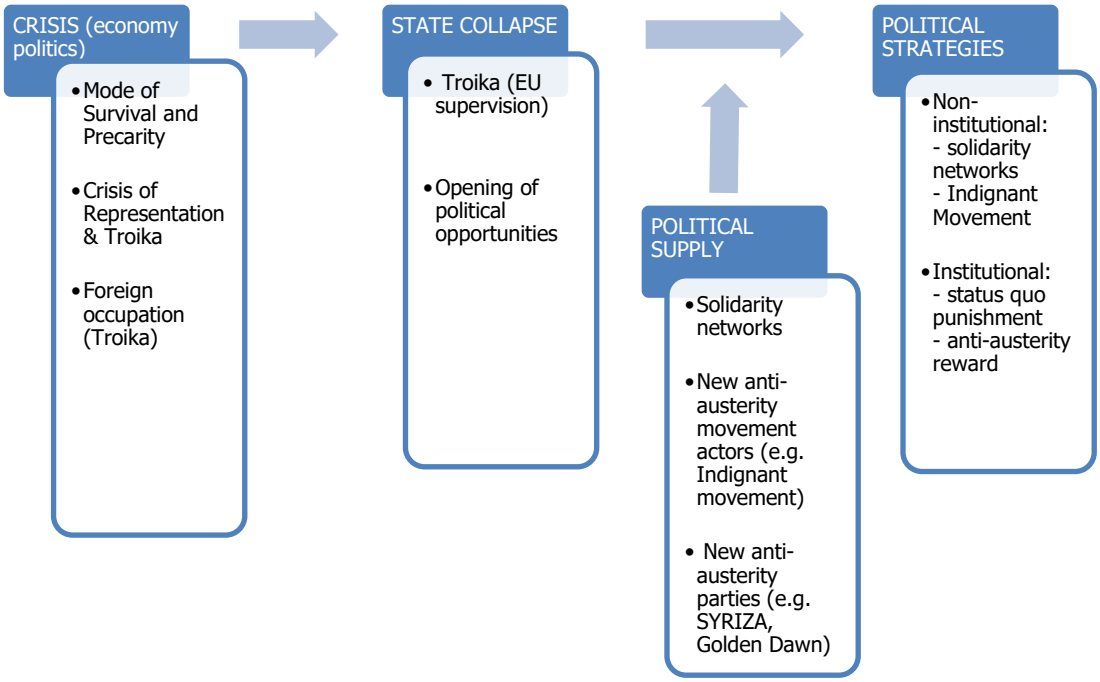
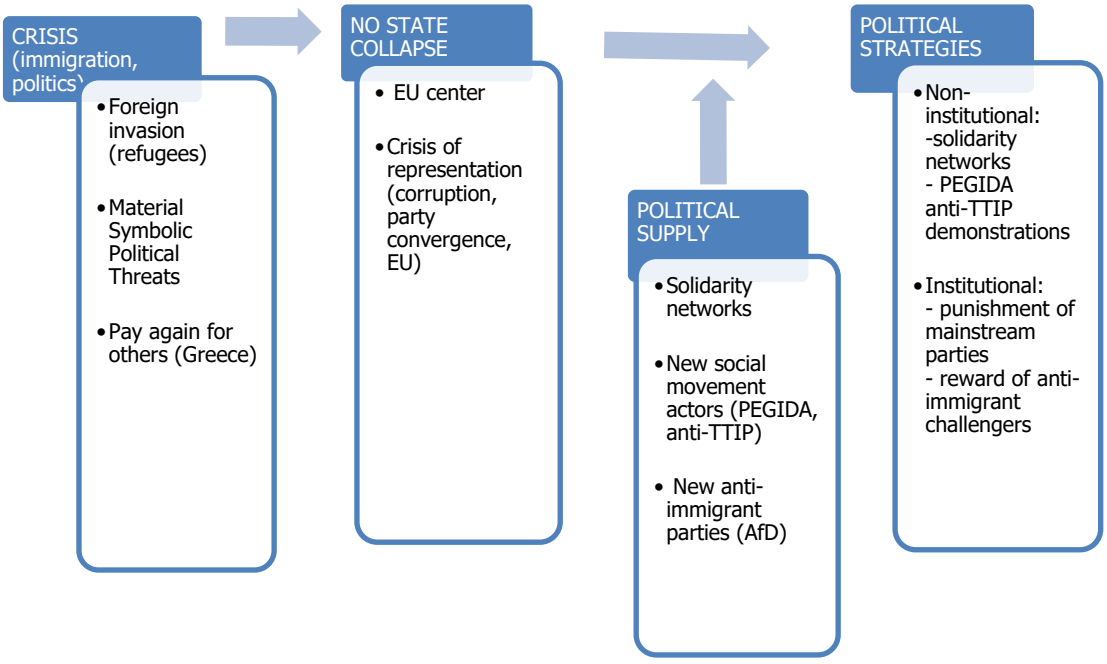


Figure A6.2. The crises and political strategies in Germany



Summary

The thesis examines the processes of crisis construction and political engagement in Greece and Germany in 2015-2017. Instead of taking "the crisis" as a given by relying on a deductive theoretical conceptualization, it investigates how citizens themselves define the crises and their political strategies in two countries that highlight Europe's power asymmetries between the north and the south. Synthesizing literature on political talk, critical junctures, economic voting, political process and intergroup psychology the thesis introduces a novel grounded theoretical framework. Mixed methods were selected in order to combine representative survey data on generalizable political patterns with in-depth focus group analysis of discourse about the explanatory mechanisms behind these patterns. The analysis indicated that different threats, multiple and multilevel, initiated a sense of overlapping crises in the two cases. In Greece the crises were triggered by the financial and political collapse, and the presence of the Troika dictating austerity from afar. Contrary in Germany the crises were initiated by the so-called refugee crisis and the lack of political alternatives among mainstream parties. Yet, in both cases, it was the political crisis of post-democratic representation at the national and European level that transformed these material and symbolic threats into crises per se. The diverse politicization of grievances, identification with political actors and political opportunity structure in the two cases shaped citizens' political strategies. In Germany, the post-materialist powerhouse of Europe, citizens' concerns centred around threats to life-quality and dominant position in the world economy. Citizens suggested moderate political strategies to render the political system more responsive to their grievances. Alternatively, citizens in Greece challenged radically the national and European establishment, as the proposed economic and political model signifies widespread poverty for the population by and large. Positions on Europe and globalization provided a new transnational dimension to political conflict, problematizing the locus of citizen influence in an increasingly globalized political environment.

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank the participants in this research project for sharing your stories and wisdom with me and the POLPART team. Without your contribution, none of this would be possible. I would not have gained insights into German and Greek politics, the ways in which citizens perceive the crises and are affected by them, the strategies they pursue to deal with those problem areas, and the place Europe occupies in citizens' hearts and minds. This book is first and foremost for you.

I'm grateful to my supervisors, Bert Klandermans and Clare Saunders for believing in me and supporting me along the way. You urged me to pursue my own ideas and analysis and when the going got tough, you were patient and supportive. Many thanks go to the reading committee, Ben Crum, Gerry Stoker, Virginie van Ingelgom, Swen Hutter and Lorraine Nencel, for taking the time to read and evaluate my work. Your ground-breaking research is partly responsible for the research questions addressed in the thesis and has guided me through the completion of the book. I would also like to express my appreciation to my colleagues from the POLPART team, Clare, Swen, Stephan, Camila, Marcelo, Sebastian, Zsolt, Gergo, Nena, Maarten, Sebastien, Teodora and Arieke. POLPART was a collaborative project from start to finish. Working with you and learning from you was a great pleasure.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank my mentors at the Vrije Universiteit, Jacquelien van Stekelenburg and Bert Klandermans for introducing me to the social change and conflict research group and creating a family atmosphere at the department. I'm so lucky to have met my colleagues at the VU, Maarten, Sebastien, Arieke, Teodora, Jasper, Sara, Fatma, Soumia, Ali, Tim, Twan, Igor, Silvia, Jasmijn, Anouk, Paulina, Dimitris, Ietje and Eels. Your friendly presence and warm smile made all the difference on those rainy, busy days. Many thanks go to the Access Europe network, esp. Ben Crum, Catherine De Vries and Gareth Davies, and the Identity and Diversity (IDI) group, esp. Halleh Ghorashi, Sawitri Saharso, Kathy Davis and Lorraine Nencel, for keeping us up to date with the latest developments in (non)European politics, intersectionality and diversity.

I'm also grateful to Donatella Della Porta, Hanspeter Kriesi and Swen Hutter for welcoming me to the research groups at Scuola Normale Superiore and the European University Institute and sharing insights on various chapters of the dissertation. Many thanks go to my first

academic family at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Aphrodite Baka, Vicky Triga, Lia Figgou and Maro Dikaiou for your guidance and support during my studies abroad. Finally, I owe huge debt to my friends and family in the Netherlands, Germany and Greece, Anca, Rik, Camille, Aurelien, Sandra, Sara, Dimi, Margarita, Aristoteli, Stella, George, Linus, Max, Karlo, Denise, Felix and Denis. You supported me in the highs and lows of the PhD process, survived the long political discussions and psychotherapy sessions, and gave me perspective when I needed it. I couldn't have written this thesis without your love and encouragement. As always, my utmost love and appreciation go to Theano and Vasilis.